



**THE ABOLITION
OF THE SLAVE TRADE
IN SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA** 1885-1950

A. E. Afigbo

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A. E. Afigbo



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PREFACE

This work is a history of the campaign that was waged by Great Britain in colonial Nigeria from about 1885 onward, to abolish the internal slave trade in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland; a region also known as Eastern Nigeria, southeastern Nigeria, the Eastern Provinces or the trans-Niger provinces.¹ To put it differently, it is the study of a policy and the attempt to implement that policy in practice as well as the study of the resistance to it by those against whom it was directed (or is it in whose interest it was designed?). It treats the internal slave trade and the war against it in this region and period as a separate theme from the institution of slavery in the same area and the campaign to root it out generally known as emancipation. For this reason, and because slavery and the effort at emancipation have received more (though be it said still inadequate) attention from scholars, the work concentrates entirely on the aspect of the *slave trade* and its fortunes under British colonial rule commonly known as *abolition*. In its own way, therefore, the work is, for southeastern Nigeria or the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland, a continuation of Sir Christopher Lloyd's *The Navy and the Slave Trade*. It is also the completion of it. Instead of the Royal Navy and consuls on the one side, and European slave traders on the other, we now have on the official side the entire colonial establishment and on the other the indigenous slave traders of southeastern Nigeria.

As is well known, our area of interest came into prominence as a rich source of slaves during the Atlantic slave trade and as a major battle zone between the British Preventive Squadron and unrepentant slave dealers between about 1807 and 1860. Most of the available history books on the region for this period, when they touch at all on this human tragedy, have been content to recycle the information that the campaign against the evil in the Atlantic had actually led initially to increased slave dealing in the hinterland and along the coast. This information was first made public in 1864, during the sittings of the British Parliamentary Select Committee on West Africa, by Sir Richard Burton, who gave evidence before it. None of the authors of the available books has followed up with an attempt to show what happened to the internal slave trade after this time and how it happened. This is a situation that could give the uninformed and the unwary the impression that the internal slave trade of the Bight and its hinterland more or less dried up or fizzled out with

the success of the Atlantic phase of the campaign. In this work we not only seek to show that any such impression is wrong but also make an effort to correct it and to reconstruct the different phases of the campaign in the hinterland of the Bight which went on virtually without a break throughout the period of British rule in Nigeria. It maintains that slave dealing, a favorite term used during the period, covers many shades of activity or crimes against the human person—catching/recruiting persons to keep or sell as slaves, selling persons as slaves, and keeping persons as slaves. Trading in slaves covered the first two sets of activities, and we may describe it as the stream that fed what was, for centuries, an ever-growing pool of slavery. When we refer to the campaign for the abolition of the slave trade we refer to the effort made to eliminate these two sets of criminal activities—an attempt to cut off that stream in order, first, to make the pool of slavery stagnant and then to force it to start drying up.

It must be emphasized that the two campaigns were different and were treated as different by the colonial power, even though it was recognized that the slave trade and slavery were simply the two heads of the same monster. Throughout the nineteenth century, it was the head known as the slave trade that preoccupied the powers concerned with the future of Africa. This was otherwise also known as the open sore of Africa. The idea of effective occupation, which the “scrambling” powers invented for themselves, was aimed largely at the slave trade. Up to the Brussels Conference of 1889, it was the slave trade that the powers were obsessed with. It was only as effective occupation became a fact that the powers came face to face with slavery and that the issue of emancipation came up. In the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland, at least, the colonial power, Britain, continued to treat the campaign for the abolition of the slave trade as a separate agenda from the plan for the emancipation of slaves. The British created and maintained separate files for the two matters, rarely if ever cross-referencing from the one to the other. The head of the monster known as slavery and emancipation may have monopolized the attention of scholars ever since, but this author feels that the story of what became of its elder brother still deserves to be told.

Scholars may debate whether the Atlantic segment of the campaign against this evil was heroic or not, since some of those who championed it claimed to have taken their stand on the high ground of philanthropy, humanitarianism, and evangelicalism while some of their opposite numbers did not. This work shows that there was hardly any trace of heroism and high-mindedness in the campaign to abolish the internal segment of this nefarious trade, because its sponsors, unlike some of their predecessors in this campaign, were for the most part barefaced imperialists who saw the death of the slave trade as just one other by-product of the triumph of British *imperium* or the *pax Britannica* with its dominant economic interest. But that is not to say that one may not admire their doggedness and commitment to a program that sought to save those who apparently did not want to be saved, people who not only apparently

“cheerfully” sold their children but also on occasions “sold themselves by half” through becoming pawns—a position from which some of them slid in time into full slavery. Dr. Walter Ofonagoro, in his *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria*, thinks we should discount the charges of slave dealing and cannibalism which imperial agents brought up repeatedly against communities in this zone in the early decades of the twentieth century. But we think this stand of his is misguided, and smacks of the importation of adolescent nationalism into the writing of history. Indeed, slave dealing was real for almost the entire duration of the colonial period, even though it kept changing in character and technique, as will be seen in this work. By the 1930s, the colonial establishment had been worn down by the undying lack of repentance of these merchants of evil and as a result had come to place their hope for the extirpation of the trade on the corrosive effect over time of education and general civilization.

The story of this important and protracted campaign is one that should have been told long before now: it has, however, been neglected by our historians for reasons which are not very clear but some of which are mentioned in this work. Rather more, but not necessarily definitive, work has been done on the attempt to abolish slavery itself. This neglect of the topic is surprising since, as will become clear, the internal slave trade was more or less synonymous with the Aro and the Aro synonymous with it, and many have written on the Aro, including Dike and Ekejiuba, who produced a full-length book on them without making any substantial reference to this campaign. Perhaps the closest attempts to a study of the campaign before now were the efforts that led to my journal articles entitled “The Aro Expedition of 1901–1902: An Episode in the British Occupation of Igboland,” “The Nineteenth Century Crisis of the Aro Slaving Oligarchy,” and “The Eclipse of the Aro Slaving Oligarchy 1901–1927.” Thus my interest in the subject goes back to about the 1962–63 academic session, when the essay on the expedition was written at the University of Ibadan for the Irving and Bonar Graduate Essay Competition in History.

My collection of the material that went into this work, however, did not begin until about the mid-1970s, only to be interrupted again and again by various assignments within and outside the academy. However, when I had almost given up every hope of finding the time to complete it, Providence came to my rescue with the award of a visiting fellowship in African Studies at St Antony’s College, Oxford. Apart from making it possible for me to take up the subject full-time, the award gave me the opportunity to use the sources available on the subject at Rhodes House, Oxford, and in the National Archives of Great Britain at Kew Gardens—formerly known as the Public Record Office (PRO). It was also at Oxford that I began and completed the first draft of the chapters.

What I have done here is to reconstruct the simple story of the campaign, identify the areas of supply and demand, and show that because the so-called

legitimate trade went hand in hand with the slave trade, the British shied away from sanitizing not only the regions of supply and demand but also the regional markets which served as centers for a substantial part of this nefarious business. The British recognized that such actions would also adversely affect the legitimate trade. Some attention was also given to examining how those who were made to abandon the business of slave dealing made the adjustment to the new way of life marketed by the British, but the information available to the author on this aspect was disappointingly small. It is hoped that as succeeding historians take up the challenge of writing the social and economic history of the period, which will include a history of the slave trade in the round, it will be possible to uncover more information on this, especially through more intensive local studies, particularly of such regional markets as Agbagwu in Uzuakoli, Uburu in Afikpo, Afor Umuna in Okigwe, and Orié Amaraku also in Okigwe, which remained key centers of the trade to the end. Other areas of further research which this study has further highlighted include the ancient trade link between southeastern Nigeria on the one hand and the region occupied by the Igala, the Idoma, and the Tiv on the other, as well as the link between the upper Cross River and the Bamenda grasslands, all of which continued to feed the slave traders of the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland with slaves throughout the period. I should like to hope that what has been accomplished in this work will shed some light on this dark corner of our social history as well as encourage some other scholars to give the institution of slavery itself in the region and the movement for emancipation, in similar fashion, fuller attention than it has in fact received as yet, in spite of superficial appearances.

I would like to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to the staff of the Nigerian National Archives, the British National Archives, and Rhodes House, Oxford, for their unstinting help throughout the duration of my almost frantic pursuit of the sources. I also thank Professor William Beinart, the director of the Centre for African Studies at St Antony's; Anthony Kirk-Greene, formerly of the Nigerian colonial Administrative Service but now a fellow of St Antony's; Professor Murray Last of the Department of Anthropology, University College, London; Mrs. Ulli Parkinson, the administrative secretary of St Antony's; Mr. Jonathan Shawyer, the center secretary; and Mr. Michael Mowart, the warden of Commonwealth House, for their friendship and support during my stay at Oxford. Shehu Othman, Ukoha Ukiwo, and Mrs. A. Ukiwo provided a Nigerian caucus that helped to make a great difference to the atmosphere in which I worked. Professor Benyamin Neuberger and Dr. (Mrs.) Belina Neuberger, who were visiting from Israel at the time when I was in Oxford, gave me a taste of friendship at first sight, which I cannot but continue to cherish and cherish. I should also like to register my indebtedness to Professor Onwuka Njoku, the dean of the Faculty of

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A. E. Afigbo
Ezihehaus
Amaikpa-Ihube
Okigwe, Imo State

1

PHILANTHROPY AND HUMANITARIANISM LEFT OUT IN THE COLD, 1830–84/85

There is virtually no doubt that it was in the quest for trade and geographical knowledge that Europe came to West Africa, and therefore to the Bight of Biafra, our region of interest in this study. This was in the fifteenth century. After that it was the slave trade across the Atlantic that sustained for over three hundred years the interest that Europe developed in West Africa in the process of that quest. During those three hundred years and more, the relationship that existed between Europe and West Africa was run on Europe's side by its private businessmen operating as individuals, groups, and organized companies of merchants. Then came the abolition of the slave trade, from 1807 onward, which Britain initiated and championed and which inaugurated the era of more or less sustained intervention by European governments in the affairs of West Africa. Thus, 1807 stands out in the history of Euro—West African relations on two grounds—it marks the beginning of the end of the transatlantic slave trade and the onset of that official European engagement with West Africa which was to end in the colonization of the region by Europe for about a century.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the slave trade and its by-product, slavery, occupied and continues to occupy a prominent place in the history and historiography of West Africa, a fact that is clear from even a cursory glance through any general history of the region for the period 1500–1900. There were two segments to the trade—the external segment which covered the slave trade in the Atlantic and from there to the New World, and the internal segment which covered the slave trade in the hinterland of the Atlantic coast of West Africa. The existing state of scholarship on the subject suggests that we appear to know more about the history, economics, and sociology of the external segment than we do about the internal segment. If we take up, for instance, the history of the movement to abolish the trade, we have on the

external side such great classics as Sir Christopher Lloyd's *The Navy and the Slave Trade*, A. Mackenzie-Grieve's *Last Years of the African Slave Trade*, Reginald Coupland's *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*, and Eric Williams's *Capitalism and Slavery*, but little or nothing on the internal side to compare them with.¹

There is also an astounding amount of literature on the slave trade in the Atlantic and the New World as well as on the aftermath of slavery there, while for Africa we have only a handful of works and these mainly on the end story of the saga, that is, on slavery and the weak effort made by the colonial powers to abolish it or secure emancipation for the victims. Indeed, the general attitude and stance of scholars here could easily lead the uninformed and the unwary to think that the ending of the external segment of the trade also meant, more or less automatically and logically, the ending of the internal segment. The tendency among scholars has been to jump from the study of the abolition of the external traffic to the study of the conditions of slaves in Africa and the supposed process of emancipation during the period of colonial rule. Yet nothing could be further from the truth or more calculated to mislead the unwary than anything that encourages the impression that with the successful ending of the external trade, the internal segment also ended.

With this study we want to fill in this gap in our knowledge. It will be shown that the evil of actual trading in slaves continued to exist in various shades and forms in some areas for nearly another hundred years after the elimination of the Atlantic segment. We will also seek to reconstruct, as best we can, the history of the campaign (if indeed it was a campaign, in the sense of a sustained drive) to abolish it. Our chosen case study is the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland, a region that was notorious for its intensive and extensive involvement in the iniquitous traffic, and therefore a region from the fabric of whose history the slave trade story should blaze out in dazzling colors. But this has so far not been the case.

From our reckoning, there are at least half a dozen major forays into the history of this zone in the period after about 1885 that should have taken up, in some manner, the issue of the continuation or otherwise of the campaign in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland. For instance, we have the landmark studies of Margery Perham and Alan Burns, written and published during the colonial period with a view to educating the world on the progress of Britain's self-imposed civilizing mission in Nigeria. Without doubt, these great servants and advocates of the colonial empire were aware of the problem that the traffic posed to the government in the interior, at least in its early years. Perham, for instance, noted that

For some four centuries they [the people of the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland] exported large numbers of their population obtained at fourfold cost or more by inter-tribal war, raiding and kidnapping, or by the sale of criminals, while the bulk of imports consisted of firearms and spirits. This trade, in spite of the efforts of the Navy, increased in volume after its renunciation by the British. Nor did the slow

substitution of legitimate trade, upon which Buxton and his friends had placed such hopes, do much at first either to elevate the natives or to improve their relations with us.²

Even though the two authors would have liked their readers to see the elimination of the slave trade and slavery as one of the major achievements of British rule in Nigeria, neither made the attempt to tell the story of how the goal was attained, if indeed it was attained. “The British were pledged,” wrote Miss Perham in respect of our area of interest, “to abolish the slave trade and slavery, but no more than in Northern Nigeria could this be done with a stroke of the pen.”³ With this statement she quietly left the theme of the slave trade and its abolition and slid into the story of the difficulties encountered by the British in making the “house system” of sociopolitical organization found in the coastal states adjust to the new climate created by colonial rule. In other words, she did not care to tell us, if she knew, whether the evil was ever abolished or with how many strokes of the pen.

Alan Burns limited himself to the following assertion: “With slave dealing . . . the government would allow no compromise and it was necessary in 1902 to attack the powerful Aro tribe which was still unsubdued.”⁴ In his view, therefore, the campaign for the abolition of the internal slave trade in the Biafran hinterland took the form of the Aro Expedition of 1901–2. His next contribution to the story of the abolition of the traffic was to assert that one impact of the entire colonial edifice and system lay in the suppression of the slave trade and slavery:

The influence of these large public works [the building of railways, harbours, roads, etc.] on the African population was very great. Apart from the civilizing effect of easier communication, there was a marked increase in trade and in the circulation of coin. Thousands worked for the government, and were paid in money with which they were able to purchase for themselves both necessaries and luxuries, returning to their villages to boast of their adventures and to show off their recently acquired finery to their less sophisticated brothers. There is no doubt that this free labour, which became increasingly popular did a great deal towards the suppression of slavery.⁵

After these two books came the set of books written by the first generation of Nigeria’s modern academic historians. A listing of them would include J. C. Anene’s *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885–1906*, Tekena Tamuno’s *The Evolution of the Nigerian State: The Southern Phase 1898–1914*, K. K. Nair’s *Politics and Society in South Eastern Nigeria 1841–1906*, W. I. Ofonagoro’s *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria*, S. Attoe’s *A Federation of the Biase People: Origin and Development of Biase Ethnicity 1750–1950*, E. A. Ayandele’s *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842–1914*, and Felix Ekechi’s *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857–1914*. Each of these titles made a major contribution to our knowledge of the history of the Biafran region in the period of our

interest here. Also each grew out of a thesis submitted originally for a higher degree of a university and thus was based on primary research. But none took up, as a theme deserving of sustained investigation, the campaign against the internal slave trade and slavery. This was so even with the missionary histories of Ayandele and Ekechi, which may be said to belong to the genre of social history. Thus, missionary expansion and influence in the Biafran hinterland were not fitted into the struggle against the slave trade and slavery and the regeneration of the supposedly socially benighted in our area of interest. Yet in the nineteenth century, missions and missionary activity were seen in a special sense as a major plank in the campaign against the slave trade.

The same is true of Ofonagoro's avowedly economic study, much as it drew attention to kidnapping and debt redemption as methods by which slaves were recruited in the region in the precolonial period, and to the fact that the Aro were not the only slave dealers in the precolonial Biafran hinterland. Ofonagoro also drew attention to the fact that slave dealing, after having changed its character and gone underground, continued in colonial south-eastern Nigeria under the nose of its British rulers. He was, however, to complain many years later about the neglect of the slave trade and related issues by historians of Southern Nigeria. According to Ofonagoro,

Much has been written on the colonial history of Southern Nigeria especially as regards the political and administrative aspects of British rule, indigenous African responses to the conquest and occupation of their country by British troops, and the imposition of colonial governments over their territories and peoples. The problem of forced labour and the related question of slavery in the context of British colonial policy in Southern Nigeria has yet to receive the attention it deserves.⁶

We find the same measure of default in respect of interest in the campaign against the slave trade and slavery in the works of Anene, Tamuno, and Nair. Tamuno's book was, in his own words "a further contribution to Nigeria's administrative history. . . . The process through which a common political entity, a central authority and a co-ordinated economic and physical system developed in Southern Nigeria until the 1914 amalgamation."⁷ In other words, it is political and administrative history without any pretensions to an interest in social history. Therefore, Tamuno's neglect of issues of the slave trade and slavery is easy to understand. His closest attempt to contribute to the reconstruction of the campaign against the internal slave trade was his reference, first, to the part played by the export trade in palm oil in supplanting the "export trade in slaves" and, second, to the fact that the battle by the colonial government to ensure that actions taken against slave dealing did not lead to the collapse of the house system of the coastal states. According to Tamuno,

In the British attempt to abolish the slave trade and slavery in Southern Nigeria there were two separate but historically inter-related processes. One was the replacement

of the foreign trade in slaves by the export of palm produce. The other stemmed from the enlargement of the coastal trading Houses so as to transport more palm produce and other trade goods from the inland districts, to meet increasing export demands.⁸

His third contribution was to mention that the expedition against the Aro was undertaken in part as a countermeasure against slave traders and slavery. In his words, “In the Ibo hinterland, the British anti-slavery campaign threatened the social, economic and political institutions associated with the Long Juju (Chuku Ibinokpabi) and other Ibo oracles.”⁹

Nair, in *Politics and Society in South Eastern Nigeria 1841–1906*, gave some attention to the labor and other social implications, for coastal society, of the conquest of Aro Chukwu, which, he said, closed the slave markets of the interior. This, according to Nair, helped to worsen the threat that the house system of the coastal states was facing as a result of the imposition on the region of the *pax Britannica* with all its implications, especially its official policy of antagonism toward the slave trade and slavery. There is no word about the campaign itself, its nature and progress.¹⁰ In his *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885–1906*, Anene showed an interest in three aspects of the slave trade and slavery in the Biafran area. The first was the manner in which Britain’s championship of abolition gave it the opportunity to undermine the authority and independence of the states and communities in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland and thus to impose its rule on them. The second was the fact that the action taken against the Aro in 1901–2 was in some respects a part of the campaign. The third was the problems of social and political control, which the abolitionist movement created for the coastal states, and the effort to counter them. From the beginning to the end, *Southern Nigeria in Transition* is a study of the imperial regime known as the “protectorate system” and of how in the process of its application to the Biafran area there developed many gaps and inconsistencies between the theory and the practice associated with that system.¹¹ In *A Federation of the Biase People*, Dr. (Mrs.) Attoe devoted 2 pages out of 275 to a discussion of the two institutions of slave trade and slavery, which, like many other authors already mentioned, she treated interchangeably, as if they meant the same thing, and thus in places used material appropriate to the slave trade to draw conclusions on the abolition of slavery and vice versa.¹²

When we come to various works on this region that were written for general readers and for undergraduates and college students, we find the state of the literature on abolition confusing and unsatisfactory. This is particularly so in the sense that the materials used in the attempted reconstructions were for the most part relevant to what we may describe as the early and middle phases of the campaign in the Atlantic and the coastal states, that is, relevant to the period 1807–85. But they were, for the most part, deployed as if the story they told constituted the full story of the campaign, that is, also covered the hinterland phase. Typical examples of these works would include Michael

Crowder's *The Story of Nigeria*, Elizabeth Isichei's *A History of Nigeria*, and a handbook on Nigerian affairs, titled *Nigeria: A Country Study*, issued by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress. Also to be mentioned in this group of works is R. O. Ekundare's tantalizing book, *An Economic History of Nigeria 1860–1960*, which, although targeted on economic and social history and running to 458 closely packed pages, says next to nothing on what its author described as the "successful battle against the slave trade and slavery" in the hinterland.¹³ His was, perhaps, the greatest exhibition of the failure to recognize that the movement had an internal phase which was not ended simply in consequence of what took place in the Atlantic. If one followed his stance, the conclusion would be that by 1860 the slave trade had ceased to be an issue of any consequence in many parts of West Africa, for after that date he had nothing more to say about the institution and the movement against it.

In a similar manner, Michael Crowder ended his discussion of the movement against the slave trade with the evidence of Sir Richard Burton before the Parliamentary Select Committee on Africa in 1864.¹⁴ Elizabeth Isichei made no clear distinction between the slave trade and slavery and thus no distinction between the abolition of the trade and the emancipation of slaves. Indeed, this observation applies to most writers on the slavery and slave trade question in our area. In the end, Isichei came up with the bewildering statement that "The end of slavery was a major transformation, yet it is seldom mentioned in the colonial records."¹⁵ The truth of the matter is that slavery has not yet ended even as this chapter is being prepared! The ambiguity and confusion characteristic of the general works in the matter of the abolitionist movement as it touched the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland are best illustrated by the following statement from *Nigeria: A Country Study*:

The campaign to eradicate the slave trade and substitute for it trade in other commodities increasingly resulted in British intervention in the internal affairs of the Nigerian region during the nineteenth century and ultimately led to the decision to assume jurisdiction over the coastal area. Suppression of the slave trade and issues related to slavery remained at the forefront of British dealings with the local states and societies for the rest of the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth century.¹⁶

In other words, the abolitionist movement was for these authors largely a nineteenth-century phenomenon. But the truth of the matter is that while the Atlantic segment of the traffic was abolished in the nineteenth century, and the attempt to abolish the slave trade and slavery in the Bight took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for the hinterland of the Bight the movement was from the beginning to the end a twentieth-century phenomenon.

In sum, therefore, there has been no major or targeted study of the process and methods, if any, by which the internal slave trade, or even slavery, which has attracted more attention among scholars, in the Bight of Biafra and its

hinterland was extinguished. If anything, the existing state of scholarship could be charged with appearing to give the impression, if not by design then by default, that all there was of the campaign to abolish the trade was what happened in the Atlantic and maybe among the coastal states, and that the successes achieved in the Atlantic and on the coast more or less took care of most of the problems posed in the interior by the slave trade, slave traders, slavery, and slave keepers. The reason for this stance among the scholars and for the consequent situation in scholarship will be examined, along with an attempt to show that there was an internal phase of the campaign and to reconstruct its story from what survives of it in the records.

To this end, and to ease our understanding of our subject and of the course and character of its history, it is necessary to make one thing clear: that is, that we are dealing with the official intervention of the British state or government in the affairs of the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland; and that that history or intervention divides itself into three phases—the phase supposedly significantly characterized by philanthropy, humanitarianism, and evangelicalism (1807–30), the period of indecision and transition to economic imperialism (1830–84/85), and the period of unabashed economic, political, and cultural imperialism (1885–1960). Each phase marked a change in the history of the campaign and, as we shall show, these changes help to explain the state of the history and historiography of our subject.

Two important features marked the first three hundred years or so of the Atlantic slave trade. The trade was unrestricted in the sense that hardly any serious or significant voices were raised against it. It was also an affair of private businessmen from Europe and the New World. Then came 1807 as a landmark date. In that year, Britain, whose businessmen dominated the trade, not only abolished it for its nationals but subsequently through the use of diplomacy, international bribery, and Britain's powerful navy sought to make that abolition effective and to extend it to the nationals of other European states. With this, the first phase of the campaign started; this phase lasted until about 1830. The following features marked this first phase of the campaign. It was dominated by the navy, which took action against ships, coastal states, and businessmen who sought to defy the ban. The campaign was largely offshore with limited action onshore. Also, much as economic considerations arising from changes in the economic base and structure of the British Empire were implicated in the reasons for abolition, as Eric Williams and others have shown, some would argue that other determining arguments appear to have been derived from such sentiments as were called at the time philanthropy, humanitarianism, and evangelicalism. Adherents of these sentiments in British public life were no doubt active, vociferous, and influential and thus their stand helped to dictate policy and action in the matter. But, of course, as Sir Reginald Coupland has said, in this matter it would be difficult, if not indeed impossible, to disentangle all the motives which were in operation and to assign each its proper relative weight.¹⁷

This was the trend and pattern until 1830, when the sponsors of geographical “discovery” in Africa recorded a historic achievement in the success of the Lander brothers, whose journey showed that the hitherto supposedly mysterious River Niger emptied into the Atlantic through what is today known as the Niger Delta, in and around which European traders had conducted business for three hundred years or more. With that event our second phase set in. This phase was marked by a shift in the weight of forces determining British official policy in the Bights of Benin and Biafra. This shift involved a stepping-down of whatever role humanitarianism, philanthropy, and evangelicalism had played in the earlier stages of the movement, and thus a stepping-up of the role of commercialism and considerations of the international power game. On the achievement of the Lander brothers, Dike wrote: “This epoch-making event altered the emphasis, so far as the Delta was concerned, from exploration to commerce. The river became to the trading European community an arm of the Atlantic Ocean, the main road to the gold and treasures, real or imaginary, of the vast interior.”¹⁸ He continued:

From the thirties to the end of the century the Niger and its Delta became the focus of attention and witnessed the long series of scientific and commercial expeditions organized by the new school of inland (as opposed to coast) traders, a movement that was to make Nigeria a British protectorate. The region provides the best illustration of the process by which the trading activities of 500 years led in the nineteenth century to the political subjection of West Africa. The history of the Delta in the years 1830–85 is therefore the history of one of the high ways of imperialism in West Africa.¹⁹

As a result, from this period onward we begin seeing actions taken by the British Government and its agents, in West Africa generally and in the Bight of Biafra specifically, which mainly advanced British economic and political interests there without too much thought for the genuine interests of the native inhabitants. One of these steps was the extension of the well-known slave trade treaties to the city-states of the Bight with clauses giving British businessmen various economic advantages and the British Government the right to intervene in what previously had been the internal affairs of the states.²⁰ Exactly nineteen years after the onset of this phase, Britain appointed a resident agent, dubbed a consul, to oversee and coordinate its interests and those of British businessmen in the entire area known as the Bights of Benin and Biafra. Before that date, writes Alan Burns in the first standard general history of Nigeria, “No attempt had yet been made to interfere with native administration in any part of Nigeria,” but from that date, “direct British influence in Nigeria may be said to have begun.”²¹

This new political and economic development grew from strength to strength, thereby driving the campaign against the slave trade as such into a corner. Dike has shown that, after 1830, the concern on all sides was not so much with carrying the campaign into the farthest parts of the Bights of Benin

and Biafra, but with adjusting to the economic crisis into which abolition had thrown the coastal states and their European customers. Thus he wrote:

In 1830 the task, which confronted West African traders, was one of adjustment to the new economy and changing society engendered by the abolition of the slave trade. Because for two centuries Britain had controlled the lion's share of this traffic, her dramatic withdrawal in 1807 precipitated an economic crisis among African traders. Both the British merchant and the slave trader had sunk much capital in the African trade. None could withdraw without the prospect of financial ruin, for investment in the slave trade did not merely consist in the acquisition and equipment of a slaver; expensive shore establishments were maintained and an immense quantity of goods distributed on credit to reliable African middlemen to secure their interest.²²

Dike, Anene, and Nair have also drawn attention to the crisis of political instability which the same development had created for the coastal chiefs and middlemen. Britain responded to this by gradually taking over political control along the coast. The first notable instance of this was the appointment of John Beecroft as consul, which already has been referred to.²³ In other words, in the period 1830–84, the campaign to abolish the slave trade as a project came to assume a subordinate position *vis-à-vis* the desire to enthrone the so-called legitimate trade and to create an adequate and appropriate political umbrella under which to carry it on.

The progressive downgrading of the campaign *vis-à-vis* the upgrading of the naked economic and political interests of imperial Britain was speeded up and intensified following the challenge of rival European nations—France and Germany in particular—in the region between the Niger Delta and the Cameroons in the 1870s. To counter this challenge, Britain had to come out openly to assert its interests at the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884–85 and then put the issue beyond all question in international law by proclaiming the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland a province of its far-flung empire under the name and title of the Oil Rivers Protectorate in 1885.²⁴ Commenting on these events, Anene wrote:

Internationally, British interests were secure on the Lower Niger and in the Oil Rivers. Britain had secured the region with great trade prospects and the best waterway into the interior. All that was left was to break the power of the coast middlemen and chiefs—but that could wait.²⁵

After these episodes, the third phase, which we described above as one of unabashed economic and political imperialism, set in, not so much for the purpose of driving the anti-slave trade campaign to a successful conclusion but to ensure that those interests which were asserted at the Berlin Conference and then given the cloak of international legal validity through the proclamation of a protectorate grew and flourished to the greater glory of

imperial Albion. The years 1885–90 saw not only the further erosion of the power and autonomy of the states of the Oil Rivers, but also the definition of the form which British rule in the area would take. In the debate and ponderings that led to a decision in favor of the protectorate policy over crown colony and chartered company rule, the future of the antislavery campaign hardly played any significant part, because it had long ceased to be a major factor in determining British policy and action in the Bight of Biafra. Even after the decision on the form of British rule was taken, the campaign for the abolition of the trade continued to occupy a back seat as actions were taken to put the protectorate policy into practice along the coast in the years 1891 to 1900.

Now the question that arises is the significance for our study of this decline in importance of the campaign against the slave trade as a factor in the making of British policy in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland. Its significance lies in the fact that as the campaign's downgrading as a policy determinant progressed, the records which accumulated on the politics and affairs of the Bight and its hinterland and on which today much of the history of the zone is based became more and more deficient in materials referring specifically to the campaign. This was unlike the position for the period 1807–30, when, in the words of Anene, official British attention may be said to have centered on "making amends for the iniquitous trade which she [Britain] and other European nations had indulged in, with incalculable harm to the Africans."²⁶ From 1830 onward, attention was divided between the campaign as a project and the need to find a substitute for the slave trade—the so-called legitimate trade; between the coastal blockade and the encouragement of inland commercial expeditions of the type organized by MacGregor Laird, Oldfield, and the sponsors of the Niger Expedition of 1841; between the demands of the old-established traders on the coast (the so-called "old coasters") and those of the new-age traders who were more concerned with the trade of the interior and the way to use the Niger waterway in getting to the fabled lands of the central Sudan. The two sets of traders were opposed to each other and appear at times to have organized dissident local groups in the region to attack their opposite numbers. With this divided attention there came a loss of focus insofar as the campaign against the slave trade was concerned.

What was more, with the introduction into the region of the consul from 1849, an overt political interest, which was eventually to swallow up everything else, came into play. This meant a further withdrawal of attention from the campaign. In fact, it meant more. After the Berlin Conference, the official attention on which the campaign had previously depended was now focused on politics, political control, and administration—that is, on defining the form and theory of political control, on finding an alternative to the weakened administrations of the coastal states, in short, on what Anene has called the consolidation of imperial authority. All this was being done in the climate of nineteenth-century political liberalism under which the state was expected

to play the part of the policeman, that is, provide and maintain law and order, while the other forces and interests in society would fend for themselves.

It was in this situation that the view came to be formed that the slave trade and all the other evils seen to afflict Africa during the period would be undermined and extinguished in time by what was described vaguely as “civilization” rather than by frontal attack as had been the assumption earlier in the nineteenth century. This also meant that apart from the naval blockade, which had long since served its purpose and in any case was inapplicable in the interior, no other known specific or targeted measure was introduced against the slave trade either along the coast or in the interior. Furthermore, the focusing of attention on political consolidation along the coast meant that a decade and a half was spent on the coast, during which time very little was done to carry the campaign into the interior. That during much of that period the campaign was almost lost sight of is shown in the astonishing fact that none of the treaties entered into with the local rulers from about the 1870s onward made any mention of the campaign against the slave trade. In this regard, it is noteworthy; for instance, that Consul E. H. Hewett’s treaty with Opobo in December 1884 made no mention of any part the Opobo chiefs were expected to play in helping to bring the slave dealers in the interior to heel. It was the same story with all the treaties entered into by the protectorate and the various Ijo, Igbo, and Ibibio communities between 1885 and the end of the century, at which time the Protectorate Government abandoned the policy of advance by treaty in favor of advance by means of military might.

The result of all this is the great paucity of information on the internal slave trade and the campaign against it that characterizes the records of this period. It is thus not surprising that the many historians who have worked on the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland during this period and whose books we have briefly reviewed in this chapter have little to say on the slave trade and the campaign against it after about 1860, because the sources they depended on were largely silent on the project. Even now that we have decided to go into that question specifically, our experience is the same. When the frontiers of the colony moved effectively from the coast to the interior, the same sidelining of the campaign continued, and thus the same paucity of information in the records, even though these records had become more copious in the information they carried, that is, information on issues other than those connected with the internal slave trade and the movement against it.

The shift of attention almost completely away from humanitarianism, philanthropy, and evangelicalism to naked political power and to equally naked economic interest had far-reaching implications for the question of the method and approach to be adopted for realizing whatever remained of the interest in abolition. Up to the 1830s, when some of the champions of abolition may be said to have, to some extent, operated from the mountain peaks of philanthropy, humanitarianism, and evangelicalism, the favored approach was direct. In this period, as already mentioned, the weapons for attacking the

traffic were the Royal Navy and treaties. Under this approach the weapons were aimed at the traffic directly and it was hoped that success in the campaign would lead, among other things, to the rise and expansion of trade in the natural resources of the regions formerly devastated by the slave trade and therefore also lead to the cultural advancement of the inhabitants, while at the same time bringing the campaigners some economic advantages. Borrowing a leaf from that robust imperialist, Cecil John Rhodes, we, with pardonable exaggeration, characterize this approach as having been based on the doctrine of “philanthropy plus five per cent.” The primary objective would have been the triumph of philanthropy and humanitarianism, while one of the by-products would have been economic enrichment, not only for the campaigners but also for the indigenous inhabitants.

But in the course of the 1830s, the campaigners climbed down from whatever was the moral high ground of philanthropy and humanitarianism and evangelicalism which they could have claimed they occupied to the marshlands of naked power and naked economic self-interest and in time adopted the indirect approach to abolition. The abolition of the traffic was now to be one of the by-products of the attainment of political and economic power in the affected region. The origin of this approach can be traced to some extent to the late 1830s and to the distortion of a program given eloquent expression by the intrepid abolitionist, Thomas Fowell Buxton, in his celebrated book, *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy*. There he had maintained

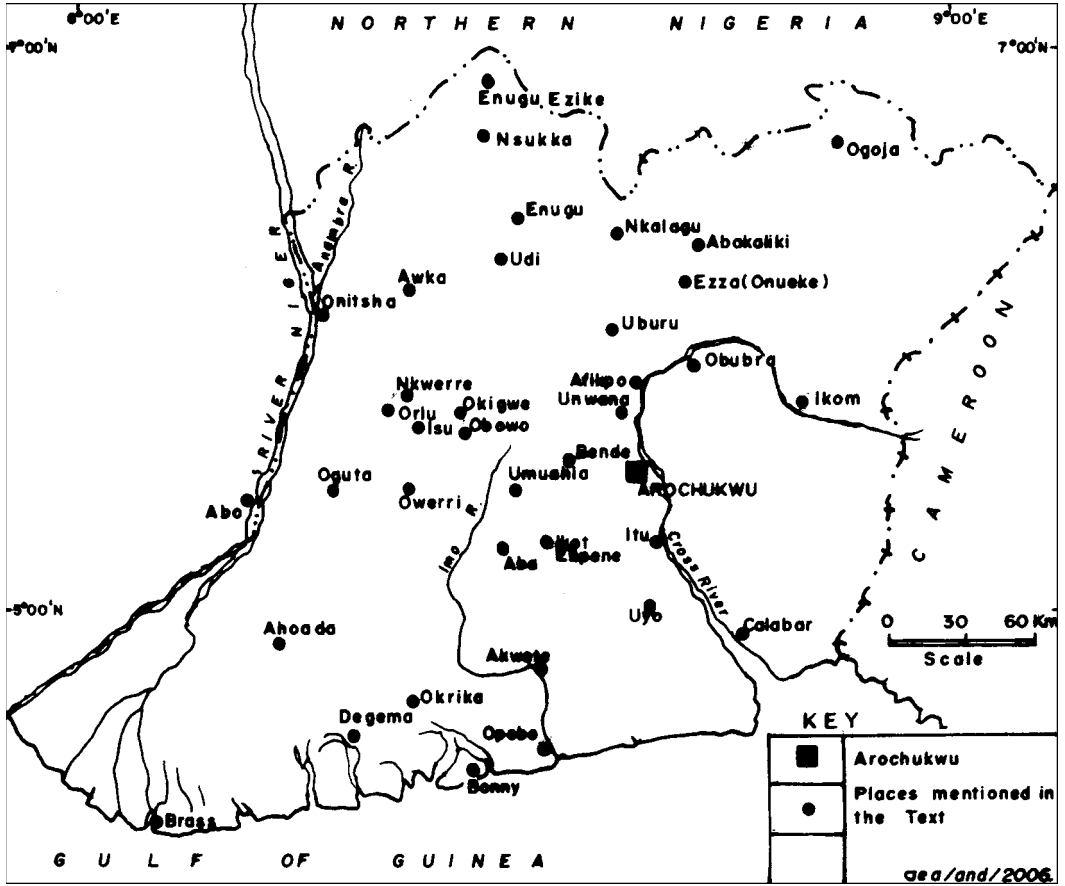
That much as diplomatic action in Europe and America, and the naval campaign in the Atlantic, had achieved much in extinguishing the overseas slave trade, these measures and approaches are powerless to extinguish the slave trade in Africa itself. To attain the second goal, Britain must take steps to make it possible for Africans to get the means to continue to be able to procure for themselves the luxuries and necessities from Europe, which three centuries of the slave trade had made necessary in their lives. This means going into the interior and establishing the conditions that would ensure the flourishing of legitimate trade or commerce.

Thus I have suggested two distinct kinds of preparatory measures. 1st. An augmentation of the naval forces employed in the suppression of the slave trade, and the concentration of that force on the coast of Africa thus forming a chain of vessels from Gambia to Angola. 2nd: A corresponding chain of treaties with native powers in the interior pledging to act in concert with us; to suppress the slave trade in their territories, to prevent slaves from being carried through their dominions, and at the same time to afford all needful facility and protection for the transport of legitimate merchandise. Thus by creating obstacles which have not previously existed, in the conveyance of negroes to the coast, and by increasing the hazard of capture after embarkation, I cannot but anticipate that we shall greatly increase the costs and multiply the risk of the slave trade.

But what is the remedy? It cannot be too deeply engraved upon the minds of British statesmen that it is beyond our power to rescue Africa, if the burden is to fall wholly and permanently on ourselves. It is not the partial aid lent by a distant nation, but the natural and healthy exercise of her own energies, which will ensure success. We

cannot *create* a remedy; but if it be true that this remedy already exists, and that nothing is wanting but its right application—if Africa possesses within herself vast, though as yet undeveloped, resources—we may be competent to achieve the much less onerous task of calling forth her powers, and enabling her to stand alone, relying upon the strength of her own native sinews. The work will be done when her population shall be sufficiently enlightened to arrive at the conviction (grounded on what their eyes see, and their hands handle) that the wealth readily to be obtained from peaceful industry surpasses the slender and precarious profit of rapine.²⁷

A close reading of the passage shows that, while indirect in parts, this program proposed by Buxton was still rooted in altruism, philanthropy, and humanitarianism. It envisaged a situation in which African rulers remained their own men and acted “in concert” with Britain to stifle the traffic in slaves while promoting the traffic and commerce in legitimate items. It also envisaged the economic empowerment of Africa by talking of a situation in which “her powers” were “called forth” and she was enabled “to stand alone, relying on the strength of her own native sinews.” In the process of calling forth Africa’s powers, Britain would also derive some economic benefits, but this would be a by-product not the primary objective. Buxton’s indirect method still held out the prospect of “philanthropy plus five per cent.” But as reinterpreted by Britain’s men of action and of little faith in the context of the highfalutin philosophy of “protection,” the “dual mandate,” and the *pax Britannica*, this was watered down to a second- or even third-degree indirect method in which the abolition or the withering away of the slave trade would be one of the by-products of promoting British economic and political power—a program of “one hundred per cent” power promotion plus some philanthropy! It is this that transforms what should be the study of the second phase of the movement for abolition into the study of one of the by-products of British *imperium* in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland. It further goes to explain why the movement ceased to occupy a prominent place in British imperial program design, implementation, and documentation, and thus to explain the difficulty we have in telling the story of how the traffic ceased to be or came to be reduced in volume. In short, the internal slave trade of the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland withered as a result of British imperial aggrandisement in the region. Other and more important consequences of the same development included the political, economic, and cultural emasculation of the peoples, states, and societies of the region.



Map 1. The three main axis of attack on the slave trade between 1885 and 1900.
 © Ambrose Dibia of the Department of Geography, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

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THE COASTAL PHASE, CA. 1885–1900

By 1885, the British policy in respect of the affairs of West Africa which put Britain's political and economic interests first and the campaign against the slave trade second was already decades old. The acceptance by the Berlin West Africa Conference of British prior territorial claims in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland was not based on any arguments produced by Britain showing the vigor and intensity of its activities against the slave trade and slave traders in the region. On the contrary, it was anchored on the fact that Britain was able to convince the diplomats at Berlin that its economic interests there were dominant. More particularly, it was able to mount an apparently irrefutable demonstration, by means of so-called treaties of protection entered into with supposed local potentates of the Bight of Biafra and its environs, that it was in a position to give adequate protection to legitimate European economic and other interests in the whole area. In the event, when Britain in 1885 declared a protectorate over the region which it now called the Oil Rivers, it was done to leave its European rivals and friends in no doubt that Britain was able and ready to live up to the international obligations it had committed itself to at Berlin, and not necessarily because it was itching to advance the movement for the abolition of the internal slave trade. Consequently, there was very little of what Britain accomplished in the life of the peoples of the Bight and its hinterland in the period covered by this chapter that was specifically calculated to achieve the extirpation of the internal traffic. The main focus of attention was to effectively establish the British presence, to define the nature and determine the structure of that presence, and to protect and advance the trading interests of British subjects there—in short, to firmly install and see to the expansion of what was called the *pax Britannica*.

Yet it would be a distortion of history to deny that the installation of the *pax Britannica* and its subsequent extension into the interior eventually led to the withering away of the evil traffic. With the advantage of hindsight, we can say that what took place here was a kind of solution by substitution—the creation of a situation in which British political authority was substituted for indigenous political authority and British economic interest was substituted for

indigenous economic interest, a major aspect of the latter at the time being the internal slave trade. Better still, we can more correctly understand what took place with the help of the light shed by the Igbo adage about what happens when you wash your hands. According to the Igbo, when you wash your hands, the left hand washes the right hand just as the right hand washes the left hand. Thus, as the British plotted and planned and toiled for the triumph of their newfound love (the so-called legitimate trade) in the Bight and its hinterland, they were also plotting and planning and toiling for the eclipse of what remained of the slave trade in the region. Similarly, on those occasions during the period of their rule here when they said they were going out specifically against the slave trade and slave traders, they were also going out for the advancement of their new economic interest.

The first five years of the period covered in this chapter, that is, the years 1885–90, could be described as the years of preparation or as the purely coastal phase in the ultimate attainment of this ambition. During these five years, all the trends and tendencies that had been building up in the Bight of Biafra since about 1807 were sorted out. The ones that appeared to point to the future were strengthened with a view to making the Bight of Biafra a sure and secure base from which the imperial project would be taken into the interior. There it was hoped that the project would, among other consequences, lead to the withering away over time of the internal slave trade. In other words, from the standpoint of our study the importance of these years lies in the fact that they saw the formulation and systematization of the theory as well as the design and installation of the structure of the *pax Britannica* that was after 1900 extended into the interior to achieve Britain's economic ambitions, entrench its political power and influence, and liquidate all barbarous customs, beliefs, and practices considered inimical to the attainment of the objectives of Britain's self-imposed civilizing mission. The position and procedure described here were not spelt out by the British using this precise form of words, or any other specific form of words that we know of, since, steeped as they were in their time-honored tradition of pragmatism, the officials concerned dealt with issues as they arose rather than on the basis of any *a priori* general principle or philosophy. But this position is what an unbiased reading and interpretation of the available evidence would appear to suggest.

All in all, there are two aspects of this subject that concern the coastal states or the Bight in this period that we shall look at in this chapter. One is the question of the steps the British took to abolish the internal slave trade of the city-states. The other is the steps Britain took to synthesize that apparently universal solvent known as the *pax Britannica* with which the British hoped to overwhelm the darkness of the interior. We shall deal with the second first.

There were two aspects to, or thrusts of, British policy and action in the Bight in this period whose subsequent extension into the interior after about 1900 was to bring about the severe decline rather than the total elimination

of the internal slave trade. Though we are compelled by the demands of the historical techniques of description and analysis to examine these aspects one after the other, it must be clearly borne in mind that they developed and existed side by side rather than one after the other. They thus reinforced each other with respect to their impact on the institution of slave trade and slavery as well as on other facets of indigenous society and culture.

The first of these two thrusts was the creation of the political and administrative institutions and measures that, among other things, constricted the political space in the Bight for the rulers of the city-states, whereas previously they had ranged freely over and controlled the entire arena. This was done, first, by excising the interests of the European community from the political/administrative schedule and control of these coastal rulers and placing these interests in the hands of a body made up entirely of elements of the European community. Since the interests of this alien community were now focused on the legitimate trade, which had, in theory if not fully in fact, replaced the slave trade as the only means by which the city-states could earn the “foreign exchange” on which they had come to depend a great deal for over three centuries, this development was a very far-reaching one. It limited the scope the coastal rulers and their merchants had to continue to engage in the slave trade or to entertain dealings with slave traders openly, since the European supercargoes would not take kindly to such an activity, as with the Atlantic abolition they had come to put that business behind them like a bad dream. The development in question had started in Bonny in the 1830s, and because it appeared to be effective as a means of promoting the new trade and therefore as a means of driving the old one underground, it was extended later to the other city-states.¹

The body so formed and run by the Europeans was called a general council. When it dealt with issues that touched exclusively on the white community, its membership was drawn entirely from that group. But when the issues were plural in character, that is, when they also touched on the interests of the local people, then some elements of the local ruling elite were admitted as members. Because the coastal states were first and foremost trading states, and because the legitimate trade had become the main focus of their external business activities since about the 1830s, this meant the general council had a very high profile in these communities, in any case a higher profile than whatever rump of political and economic power was left in the hands of the indigenous rulers. The result was the further downgrading and further blighting of whatever trade and trading institutions and practices survived from the old Atlantic system and were inimical to the new trade and the interests of the visiting Europeans. In specific terms, it meant a further downgrading and a further blighting of the slave trade and all that was associated with it.

After his appointment as the first official representative of British interests in the Bights of Benin and Biafra, John Beecroft was to push this development

further, and thus give a deeper and firmer grounding to the trends and tendencies that strongly favored British economic interests and therefore the new trade while working to the disadvantage of the earlier trade and all those who might still be harboring a residual interest in it. Beecroft did this by reorganizing the general council, having it renamed the Court of Equity, and ensuring its adoption in all the major states of the Bight. After this development, the Court of Equity and the naval squadron became the chosen instruments by which the consul compelled all and sundry in the Bight to accept his authority and intervention in all matters touching on the interests of the British Government and the European supercargoes in the region—that is to say, in the promotion of peace, the advancement of the new trade, and thus the elimination of all practices considered incompatible with the new order, especially cannibalism and trafficking in human beings. On this, the present author has pointed out in another study that “The Court of Equity and the Consul, supported by British gunboats or the threat to call them in, became the final arbiter in all causes and matters considered important for the organisation and carrying on of the produce trade.”² This meant that for the first time there had come into existence in the Bight an institution that had the power, or at least the potential power, to prosecute slave dealers and related offenders or, to put it differently, those who fell out of tune with the new order or could reasonably be charged with having done so.

After the proclamation of the Protectorate of the Oil Rivers in 1885, and especially from 1891 when Sir Claude MacDonald was appointed the commissioner and consul-general of this imperial province, these developments were taken still further to more effectively promote and secure British interests—law, order, and the trade in natural produce—while handicapping those still interested in pursuing the trade in human beings. In the event and in time, the Court of Equity spawned two related sets of institutions. One was the consular courts, in which the consul dealt with matters which were considered to be of exclusive interest to the British—especially such matters as slave dealing, murder, manslaughter, cannibalism, and disputes involving Europeans and their companies. The other was the native courts, in which the consul, presiding over members who were all supposed to be local rulers, dealt with issues which were exclusive to the natives of the Bight—matrimonial causes, petty larceny, debts, petty assaults, and so on.³ In taking matters related to slave dealing out of the native courts and handing them over to the consular courts, the intention was to ensure that the local rulers who sat as assessors in the native courts were not exposed to the temptation to use their influence and position to give cover and solace to their kinsmen and subjects still engaged in the outlawed traffic, especially since the local rulers themselves were suspected of still having a residual interest in it. Thus the arrangement ensured that the consular courts would devote adequate attention to the advancement of the new trade and also miss no opportunity that presented itself to drive the slave trade and slave traders to their grave. Of these courts

and their role in the campaign against enslavement in this period, we shall have more to say later in this chapter.

Another aspect of this political and administrative thrust designed to promote the new trade and, by implication, to fight the old was the decision which now had to be made as to what form of regime was to be adopted in the Oil Rivers—rule by a merchant company such as had been approved for the lower Niger waterway and the expanse of territory which later became Northern Nigeria; the crown colony system such as had been adopted for Lagos to the west in the 1860s; or a protectorate system whose character and implications were as yet not clearly defined. After about six years of hesitation, procrastination, prevarication, and debate among officials in London as well as investigations on the ground in the Bight, which gave the local rulers the opportunity to provide their own input, the protectorate system was chosen. The crown colony system was rejected because the peoples and societies of the Bight of Biafra were considered too primitive for a regime that implied the importation of some elements of the British constitution, especially English legal institutions and procedures. Such importation, it was feared, would cause sudden and severe disruption of the cultures of such primitive peoples, leaving them leaderless, even though it might have meant a radical and rapid solution to the problems of slavery and slave dealing.⁴ It was also considered expensive and likely to entail a heavy financial burden for the British Treasury. Merchant company administration was turned down because it was feared the traders would go only for the advancement of their selfish commercial interests, thus neglecting to attempt necessary social and cultural reforms such as the abolition of the slave trade and slavery. It was also feared that a merchant company would engage in discriminatory trade practices against rivals and thus defeat the doctrine and practice of free trade, which then was the accepted norm both in Britain and internationally. Such a contingency, it was believed, would generate avoidable conflict and controversy, since European traders whose rights would be trampled upon were unlikely to accept the situation tamely.

The protectorate system was accepted because it was considered cheap. It would, unlike the crown colony system, make haste slowly in the matter of sociocultural change and would thus obviate sudden social disruption. It would, unlike merchant company administration, enable the government to provide a level playing field for all persons and interests pursuing legitimate business. Also unlike merchant company rule, the protectorate system would not dodge the need to pursue necessary social reforms, such as the abolition of the slave trade and slavery as well as the elimination of other forms of barbarism and superstition capable of standing in the way of legitimate trade and free trade.⁵ Thus the major policy decision which was made in this period for the Bight and its hinterland, a policy whose implementation started in the Bight, had far-reaching implications for the subject of our study. It guaranteed continued war on the slave trade and slavery. But it was to be war of a special

kind, not an all-out war, in spite of what the propagandists of the colonial government might say. In any case, it was to be war at a languid pace in which the principle of *quieta non movere* was to apply, as will become clear as this study unfolds. It was this kind of war that made it possible for the evil to survive in one form or another the hundred or so years of British rule in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland.

The character of this war can best be illustrated with one or two references from the records of the Niger Coast Protectorate in this period. The first annual report of the protectorate covered the period from the inception of its regular administration in August 1891 to 19 August 1894. Copious though the report was, it had nothing to say on any action taken to directly advance the campaign to abolish the internal slave trade. Its only mention of that evil was contained in the following statement: "After the abolition of slavery, the large export trade in slaves from the Bight of Benin and Biafra was by degrees put a stop to. . . . This trade was succeeded by one of natural products of the country, almost exclusively palm oil and palm kernels."⁶ The next annual report, which covered the period 1894–95, had no entry whatever on the slave trade, although it drew attention to the agonizing problem of the house system of sociopolitical organization found in the coastal states, a problem that arose from the fact that the system was based on slavery. The annual report for 1897 also made no reference to the twin issues of slave trading and the keeping of slaves. But in all these reports, extensive space was allocated to discussing the steps taken to advance legitimate trade and to establish and expand British political and administrative power and influence.⁷ However, even though we now see these issues as linked in some way with the movement for the abolition of the slave trade and slavery, no conscious effort was made to highlight the link between the growth of these aspects of the *pax Britannica* and the campaign for the abolition of the evil traffic. We are inclined to see this as evidence that the campaign had the most shadowy existence in the consciousness of the colonial barons. On this we shall have more to say later in this chapter.

And now we come to the second thrust in the matter of building up the system with which the slave trade in the interior would be assaulted. This, as mentioned above, went hand in hand with the first thrust. At the same time as the British peace, this new order, which was expected to have a naturally sanitizing effect on the darkness of the interior, was being synthesized along the coast; an effort was also being made to extend it into the hinterland. Three lines of advance were chosen, or rather built up in time from the operation of forces of history. One was the Niger waterway, which, as Dike has shown, became from the 1830s onward, for most of the newcomers to the trade of the Bights of Benin and Biafra, the main route by means of which to penetrate the interior. This was because from the very beginning these newcomers were sold on the idea that success in the campaign to abolish the slave trade could come only from going into the interior to uproot it through

political and economic alliances and cooperation with those who supplied the coastal states and communities with their human and other wares.

The attempts by MacGregor Laird and his associates to attain this objective by storm in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s may have failed somewhat calamitously, but by the early 1880s the Niger waterway up to Lokoja had become a major commercial highway for the newcomers. Indeed, it is on record that by 1878 there were at least four well-established British merchant companies doing business on that portion of the river and taking part in cut-throat competition among themselves and with the local people. How this came about and at what cost to the peoples of that portion of the Niger has been very competently chronicled, described, and analyzed by scholars such as Dike, Ifemesia, Flint, and Ohadike.⁸ This aspect of the story is not our interest here. The point that should be noted is that the Niger waterway is on the western border of our region of study, and that the installation of the new regime there was a major blow to the internal slave trade. City-states such as Aboh, which had previously played a key role in the outlawed trade, were now drawn fully into the orbit of the new legitimate trade. So were places like Onitsha and Asaba and other smaller communities on the left and right banks of the river.

The new development, by creating new demands that as time went on grew in intensity and territorial spread, naturally brought about a progressive falling off in the demand for the items of the old trade through the shrinkage of the market for them and in the number of buyers. Though we have no statistical data or other direct evidence to substantiate this claim, we do have indirect evidence. This comes from the authenticated historical fact that the indigenous inhabitants on both sides of the river, as well as others from neighboring regions, responded in an impressive manner to the lure of the new trade, to the extent that even though they lacked capital and organization comparable to those of the European companies, they soon came to be viewed by the latter as rivals and a nuisance. It was partly for this reason that, on the flimsiest of excuses, these companies invited the consul and his gunboats to bombard the settlements of their indigenous rivals. Evidence of this abounds in the works of Dike and Flint.⁹ The spirited competition for the new trade between the natives and the European businessmen is, we submit, valid indirect evidence of the rate at and extent to which former slave dealers on this river, which was one of the major routes of the trade, as well as their descendants who would otherwise have gone into the slave trade, deserted slave dealing as their main line of business, even though some of them may have continued to buy and retain some slaves to assist them in their new lines of business. Furthermore, the blandishments of George Goldie and his company against slave raiding on the Lower Niger and in the two southern emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate, Bida and Ilorin, as well as their support of missionary activities which by definition were anti-slave trade in the region, all helped to depress the slave trade and to drive more people into other lines of business—trading and agricultural production to help feed the rising

population of the nascent urban communities such as Asaba and Onitsha and the other trading communities which dotted the Lower Niger waterway.

Nor was it only the commercial or business constituent of that cultural package known as the *pax Britannica* that was engaged in the undercutting of the old trade and all practices associated with it on this front. Christian missionary activity, which had been involved in the movement against the slave trade from quite early in the history of the campaign, also became established here. The effort was led, as we know, by the Church Missionary Society, which came into Onitsha in 1857, to be followed by the Roman Catholic mission in 1885. It was not only what they preached, but also what they did, that helped to undermine the old trade in the whole area. For decades their converts may not have been enormous in numbers, but their ideas posed a fundamental challenge to whatever theories or assumptions underpinned the old culture, economy, and society. So did their schools and churches, which at first must have looked to many people as if specially designed for the disadvantaged in society.¹⁰ Even though some of the early missionary agents came to be accused of involvement in forms of slave dealing, every person who embraced the missionaries or their teaching was by definition someone weaned from the old economy and society based on the slave trade and slavery and associated practices. That the overall impact of the early missionaries here was disruptive to the slave trade and related socioeconomic activities can be deduced from the vehemence with which the Ekumeku resistance movement attacked the missionaries and their agents as part of the movement's overall resistance to colonialism. It is reasonable to assume that when the Ekumeku charged the Royal Niger Company, the missions, and later the colonial administration with turning their culture and society upside down, one of the grounds for doing so must have been the erosion of slave dealing as a cultural and economic institution. "In its early stages," wrote Don C. Ohadike, who researched the history of this zone and period in detail, "the Ekumeku uprising was a revolt of the slave owners against the British emancipation ideals, together with the unwelcome involvement of the Christian missionaries with local customs and politics."¹¹

The second front along which gradual and indirect erosion of the base of the internal slave trade was taking place in this period was the entire area from the Nun estuary of the Niger to the Opobo River. In this area we have such well-known city-states as Brass, New Calabar, Bonny, and Opobo. These were among the communities which had been very deeply involved in the traffic in its heyday and which had been focused upon by the British Preventive Squadron during the Atlantic phase of the abolitionist campaign. By about 1860 they had, for the most part, been brought into line through bombardment, diplomacy, cajoling, and bribery. By that date they had come to the realization that they could not continue to earn, by means of the old trade, the "foreign exchange" on which much of their wealth for more than three centuries had depended, and they had accepted the fact. Their inability to

continue taking slaves for export was by itself a severe blow to the economy and wealth of their hinterland suppliers, who after that could continue trading in slaves only to the extent and for as long as there existed an internal demand for the commodity. Thus the abolition of the slave trade on the Atlantic was perhaps more than half the battle in the campaign against the slave trade in the interior. We still do not understand in full the response and reaction of the internal segment of the trade to this development. It is certainly true that even though the peoples of the coast turned their attention away from the export of slaves after about 1860, they continued to receive slaves to meet their domestic needs until the 1940s and maybe beyond, but the fact that, as the Atlantic phase of the abolition progressed, they started scouring the interior in search of items of legitimate trade meant that they became the spearhead of the abolitionist campaign there. In this matter they went ahead of the Europeans, whether traders, political officers and their agents, or missionaries.

As they went they preached, knowingly or unknowingly, by word and by deed, the doctrine of legitimate trade, which also meant the anti-slave trade doctrine, for they had to explain to their suppliers why they did not want slaves any more or as many as before but preferred palm produce, elephant tusks, and the like. They also took appointments as political agents and informers with the emerging colonial power. It is on record that they played an important part in the negotiation of many of the so-called treaties of protection which were signed between the colonial authority and a number of Igbo village-states on the southern periphery of Igboland, and all of this had implications for the abolition of the slave traffic in the interior. Yet even if they did nothing else but pioneer the legitimate trade in the interior, they would still occupy a prominent place in the story of the campaign against the internal slave trade. This is so because, in the first place, as already pointed out, the very existence of the legitimate trade meant some degree of antagonism to the slave trade, whether one said so or not. In the second place, while the European traders kept on hugging the coast until the interior was made safe for them and their business, an event that did not occur until early in the twentieth century,¹² the trading elite of the city-states began pioneering legitimate trade in the interior on the morrow of the abolition of the external traffic in slaves. That, at the latest, would mean from about the 1830s.

As on the lower Niger, the missionaries were also active here, adding the weight of what they said and did to the movement against barbarous practices of which the slave trade was one. Again it was the Church Missionary Society that led the way, establishing missions in Bonny in 1864 and in Brass in 1867. G. I. Jones has shown that wherever these missionaries planted their feet in the city-states during the period, the result was social upheaval—a split into pro-missionary and anti-missionary groups, at times along lineage lines, at other times along social lines of free and unfree.¹³ On this matter, J. C. Anene observed that

as far as the Nigerian coast was concerned, the first impact of missionary enterprise was on the slave section of the communities. In Old Calabar disobedience of their masters by slaves which began in the 1850's was a direct result of missionary emphasis on the equality of all men. Mission stations became the refuge of women and slaves who wished to escape (what they saw as) the tyranny of the indigenous social system. In Bonny, New Calabar and Brass, the slaves with the conscious encouragement of the missionaries, successfully claimed and asserted rights which contributed to the progressive undermining of the "house" system. . . . To the coast communities Christianity became a disruptive force and contributed in no small measure to political strife in Bonny and Brass.¹⁴

One consequence was that the new order had ready-made and willing informants who could make the life of such conservatives as stuck to the old barbarous lines uncomfortable, a situation that made continued involvement in the slave trade, even for domestic use, unsafe.

Unlike the situation on the Niger waterway, the political component of the *pax Britannica* was fully present and active in the city-states. From the days of John Beecroft (1849), the consuls had been deeply involved in the politics and other aspects of the life of these states, partly on their own initiative and partly through the pressure and invitation of the restless and insatiable supercargoes, who became a thorn in the flesh of the city-states as soon as the external slave trade was abolished. Students of the history of these states are well aware of how the combination of the consul and the supercargoes, acting like a sponge, soaked up the authority and independence of the rulers of these states. Also, by using the threat of the charge of continued involvement in the slave trade and other barbarous customs as the sword of Damocles over the heads of rulers and chiefs here, the same clique compelled the coastal traders to become open and dedicated advocates of legitimate commerce and by implication intrepid soldiers in the war against the slave trade.

However, one important point that should be made is that in this period the political arm of the *pax Britannica* began following behind the coastal traders to establish evidence of the British presence further and further into the interior, with the result that by the beginning of the twentieth century the program that was designed to help eliminate the slave trade had reached the southern frontiers of the Igbo and the Ibibio of the interior. As we have pointed out in another study,

the years of MacDonald (1891–1895) . . . saw the consolidation of the coastal holdings. In 1893 Vice-Consulates were set up in Degema, Akwete and Itu to serve as posts for further advance. This was followed in 1895 by the reorganization of the Niger Coast Protectorate into three divisions—Eastern, Central and Western . . . This period also witnessed the first major effort by an officer of the protectorate, Roger Casement, to penetrate the interior. He got into Anang and Obohia (an Igbo state) before being turned back. The next year Acting Vice-Consul Digan was in Obegu (another Igbo state) soliciting for treaties.¹⁵

Then Major A. G. Leonard made a celebrated journey to Bende in Igboland, the major market of the time for slaves east of the Niger, gathering a great deal of intelligence on the matter and related issues. Now, as vice-consulates were being opened further in the interior and as vice-consuls followed the Ijo traders in penetrating the region from which items of legitimate trade came, and from which slaves for export had formerly come, they joined the coastal middlemen in preaching the doctrines of legitimate trade and of abolition. Overall, therefore, about a decade or so before the white man was established effectively in their territory, the southern Igbo and the Ibibio had heard, even if they did not quite believe or understand, that dealing in slaves was evil and bound to incur the anger of the white man.

The third front for the assault on the hinterland slave traffic in this period from the Bight was the Cross River, at the mouth of which Old Calabar (or simply Calabar) lay.

Indeed, it can be suggested that this front was in some respects the main axis of attack against the internal slave trade in the Bight and its hinterland up to about the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century. First, it lay just a few nautical miles north of the island of Fernando Po, which Britain used on two different occasions as the base of the West African Squadron and consulate with which it waged the campaign against the trade in the Atlantic. Second, Calabar was for a period the seat of British consuls in the Bight of Benin and Biafra, before becoming the seat of the administration of the Niger Coast Protectorate. Thus, this front had always been too close for comfort to the enforcement arm of the anti-slave trade movement. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the rulers of the city-states of Calabar were among the first in the coastal states to sign the treaty abolishing the slave trade in return for an annual financial payment for a fixed term of years. Anene, Dike, and Nair have drawn attention to the speed with which the Calabar region fell into line without pointing out its awkward position in the geopolitics of the region and of the time, that is, so far as this campaign was concerned. With biting sarcasm, Anene wrote that “The local potentates of Calabar presented no difficulty. After all one of them was described as ‘a man of great knowledge and humanity.’” Nair, for his part, referred to the fact that as the British pushed the treaty against the slave trade at the rulers of the states in the Bight, “they found the most ready response in Calabar.”¹⁶

The result was that by the time the Protectorate of the Niger Districts was declared in June 1885, the Efik of Calabar who controlled the trade of this front had already turned their backs on much of the human traffic and embraced the trade in natural produce, except insofar as they continued to buy slaves for local needs. Since their control of the trade of this zone, even in the dark days of the slave trade, was quite extensive and firm, not only on the Cross River but also inland toward the Ibibio on the right bank of the river and toward the Cameroons on the left bank, their posture in the campaign was quite significant. The records of the protectorate during this period are

full of positive comments on the energy and dedication of Efik businessmen in pushing forward into the interior in search of legitimate trade and by implication in the spread of the doctrine and practice of the regime regarding legitimate and illegitimate trade. The importance of this may not be fully recognized unless it is also mentioned that the Efik language was already the language of commerce on the Cross River as far north as the region inhabited by the Ekoid Bantu of the area, which came to be known as Ogoja from the onset of colonial rule.¹⁷

The part played by the Efik traders and those of their sons who took up appointments with the protectorate government as political agents and whose field of work lay in the interior is in sharp contrast to the part played, or rather not played, by their European counterparts or customers who solidly refused to venture into the interior until ideal conditions were created for them and their business by the government, a state of affairs that did not come into being until the first decade of the twentieth century. This was the age when, for understandable reasons, such as a lack of bases inland, the British laid a great deal of emphasis on the Calabar and Cross Rivers as channels for doing business with the interior and for spreading their influence. The Niger, which could have competed with the Cross River in the estimation of the officials of the protectorate, was not only further to the west, but at the time was under the stifling control of a merchant company, the Royal Niger Company of George Taubman Goldie, and indeed potentially a separate “colony.” When, for instance, Claude MacDonald, the commissioner and consul-general, decided to consolidate what had been gained along the coast politically, economically, and socially, through the creation of formal institutions to enforce the *pax Britannica*, the highest of these bodies—the High Court of the Native Council of Old Calabar—was situated at Calabar and presided over by the consul-general himself.

Furthermore, this front, of all the fronts identified here, witnessed the first incursion of the missionaries who, as already shown, were quite active in the war against the old order in the Bight and therefore against the slave trade. This incursion was started in 1846 by the Presbyterians, who, like the government and the Efik traders, saw the Calabar River and the Cross River as providing them with the needed routes of access into the interior. Within only six years after the arrival of the missionaries, there was a social upheaval in Calabar involving a clash between the slaves and their freeborn owners, in the uprising of the group popularly known as the Order of Blood Men.¹⁸

As already mentioned, uncomfortable proximity to the executive agents of the official British factor in the political and economic life of the Bight and its hinterland up to the middle years of the first decade of the twentieth century remained the lot of the peoples on this front of the campaign. It was from the Calabar region that the agents of the government and its fiats went to the rest of the Bight and to those sections of its near interior in which official writs ran. The government itself regarded the Cross River as providing its main

access into the interior. When the issue of the role of the Efik in the campaign for abolition and in the spread of British influence and authority generally came up in my discussions with informants in Calabar in the 1960s, the informants drew attention to some of the aforementioned points in their attempt to explain that role. In their view, the Efik were too close to the government and its allied agencies, such as the missions and commercial companies, to do otherwise. In addition, the informants drew attention to the fact that it did not take the Efik long to recognize that it was in their interest to do so. Nair has argued that “Calabar readily collaborated with Britain in advancing British commercial interests because this was ultimately to its material benefit.”¹⁹ According to Nair, and I think he was right, this material benefit lay in the fact that “Calabar was geographically situated in a strategic position in relation to the oil producing area, for most of the oil came from the Cross River valley; the rest was sent down from the plantations at Akpabuyo and Odukpani.”²⁰

The consequence was that less than fifteen years after the declaration of the Protectorate of the Niger District, the Cross River and the Calabar River, though not necessarily their shores, had been made safe for legitimate trade through the almost total elimination of the slave trade. This, perhaps, helps to explain the fact, which we shall come to later in this study, that whereas the colonial government continued in pursuit of slave traders in Igboland well beyond the 1930s, it encountered that problem in an apparently diluted form in the Ibibio area. The fact was that the Efik, who had been the main receivers of slaves in the entire area, had not only for the most part stepped down their involvement in the business quite early but also played a key part in helping to redirect the attention of their former suppliers to the new trade in palm produce, especially as the Ibibio area was abundantly endowed with palm trees which constituted the new “gold mine.”

As mentioned earlier, there were two aspects to the campaign waged by the British against the internal slave trade from their coastal base in the period 1885–1900. There was the elaboration of the protectorate system and the attempt to install it by gradual stages in the interior, already dealt with; and then the ending of the continued involvement of the city-states in that internal slave trade, much as they had been compelled by circumstances beyond their control to turn their backs on the export slave trade. It is to this latter aspect that we now turn our attention.

On this aspect of the subject, the objective scholar cannot escape the conclusion that the authorities of the protectorate, that is, Sir Claude MacDonald and Sir Ralph Moor after him, were taken prisoners by the theory and the practice of “protection” which they worked out and which they believed compelled them to use the supposed local institutions of the people under their rule at the local level for purposes of administration, in what is popularly called indirect rule. Now throughout the Bight of Biafra the local institutions were, and still are, the so-called houses, which were based on slavery and the slave trade. Some of the heads of the houses were the potentates with whom the British

had signed the celebrated treaties of protection, while all of them were the big merchants known as middlemen through whose hands passed the trade between the European merchants and the primary producers of the interior. We have also seen that it was these men and their trading organizations that constituted the spearhead of the drive to extend legitimate trade and all that it implied by way of civilization into the “dark” interior. Without them, the work of the colonial government in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland in its early years, indeed up to the second decade of the twentieth century, would have been well nigh impossible. MacDonald and Moor knew this. They also knew that a radical and doctrinaire approach to the abolition of slave trading and slavery in the Bight would be disastrous for the authority, influence, and interest of these middlemen and indeed for the new trade that the British were in the Bight to promote. The result was that, for what we may loosely describe as “reasons of state” they turned a blind eye to the existence of slavery in the city-states, and even to the fact that the rulers of these states continued to recruit labor for their trading business by means of buying slaves from the peoples of the interior. It is indeed an astonishing thing that a regime apparently committed to the elimination of the slave trade and slavery sat in the Bight and among these city-states for almost two decades without making even one regulation, no matter how innocuous, against these twin evils. The nearest they came to any such action is revealed by a statement by Sir Ralph Moor. “For some years past,” he wrote in July 1901, “slaves bought by the coast tribes or born in the tribes have been freed from the liability to be sold by the prohibition of such sale by the Government though there has been no direct law on the matter.”²¹ It is thus not surprising that when called upon by their superintending ministry, the Foreign Office, to give an account of their stewardship in this matter, all they could do was to quibble and equivocate.

It was in 1895 that the Marquis of Salisbury asked for a report on what had been done in the Niger Coast Protectorate toward “the abolition of slavery and enslavement for debt.” In his reply, Sir Claude MacDonald not only admitted that these institutions or practices still existed throughout the Niger Delta and the Oil Rivers, but pointed out that “The largest domestic slave-owners, or to speak more correctly, the heads of houses or clans, are the so-called middlemen or trader chiefs who inhabit the lower waters of the Oil Rivers, and who have been in contact with European civilization for many years.” Many of them, he continued, had risen from the status of slavery, as a result of which it could be seen that slavery and enslavement in those societies were different from what Europeans knew and thought about these institutions. He then quoted a statement from an 1887 report by Consul Johnston to the effect that “Slaves in the Niger delta are so exceptionally treated as a rule, and have so much power and independence of their own, that they do not desire to be freed from dependence on the household to which they are attached.” In other words, in the Bight of Biafra, being bought and sold as a slave or being in a state of slavery was no great injustice requiring immediate

intervention by his government! However, one of the many forms by which people slid from freedom into slavery had received the attention of the government, because it was seriously disruptive of trade. Sir Claude MacDonald called this “enslavement for debt,” while in the local coastal parlance it was known as “chopping.” “Chopping,” said Sir Claude, had been from “time immemorial the recognized form of collecting debt and giving trade security with all tribes in the Protectorate.” The government had to intervene, he said, because this practice frequently led to “reprisals, culminating usually in intertribal war” and the total disruption of the peace of the whole district and thus of its trade. It was to deal with this situation, he said, that he had quickly opened consular posts with consular courts at such places as Old Calabar, Opobo, Bonny, Degema, and Brass, as well as minor consular courts at Itu, Okoyong, Uwet, and Akwete, courts which, in the matter of trade debt disputes, applied the principles embodied in Act V of 1843 of the Indian Legislature. A complementary remedy for the evil of enslavement for debt was the holding of extensive meetings and dialogues with the chiefs and leading merchants of the coastal region on this custom. At these meetings they were told that the government would not tolerate “chopping.” Sir Claude reported:

As soon as an Administration had been established in a district, and a sufficient constabulary force enrolled and drilled at headquarters to enforce any orders of the court, the chiefs of the district were assembled, and it was pointed out to them that the practice of seizure and enslavement for debt was one which was contrary to the interest of the community, and therefore could not be permitted, it was besides against the wishes of Her Majesty the Queen, with whom the Chiefs had made treaties and to whom they were under treaty obligations, it led to reprisals on the part of the tribe whose people had been seized, and as often as not involved the whole tribe in a war which led to a general stoppage of trade and the destruction of property and loss of life.²²

In the opinion of Sir Claude MacDonald, the two methods of dealing with the problem which were introduced under the protectorate had achieved excellent results, first, because the chiefs had come to see the foolishness and wastefulness of “chopping” as a way of collecting trade debts as well as the wisdom of his own arguments and methods as enshrined in the consular courts, their processes and procedures; and second, “because many disputes arising out of transactions in trade, which a few years ago would have ended in mutual enslavement and probable bloodshed, have been settled in the courts, or by arbitration.” But enslavement for debt was by no means at an end, since it was too deeply embedded in the customs and traditions of the people, he warned. On the question of action taken against the larger problem of slavery and other forms of enslavement, he was silent except for cautioning that in these matters, “all changes must be carried out with moderation, patience, and common sense.”²³

There is also incontrovertible evidence that the government averted its gaze even as the delta communities continued buying slaves from the interior, as well as procuring slaves on occasion by means of war. In 1896, for instance, the government induced its so-called Opobo and Bonny “friendlies” to join its own forces in a punitive expedition against the southern Igbo state of Obohia, which was accused of blocking trade routes passing through its territory, seizing traders and other *bona fide* travelers, and engaging in the slave trade and human sacrifice. As the government’s force of about 120 officers and men sacked the town, the Opobo and Bonny fighters sealed off the routes by which Obohia fugitives from the assault could have escaped into the interior. They also spent their time taking captives who were described as “boys,” that is, slaves, whom they took home as prisoners of war. But, of course, it was not only so-called “boys” that were enslaved by the Bonny and Opobo warriors, but also women and children of apparently free status. Sir Ralph Moor, the commissioner and consul-general, instead of being outraged by this conduct and ensuring the immediate return of the captives to Obohia, or declaring them free if they were really slaves as he claimed, had the temerity to excuse the conduct of the “friendlies” before his home government. It was the normal practice in wars between natives, he said. It was also, he went on, a promotion from barbarism to civilization for the captives, as they now had a chance to live as slaves in communities where the Protectorate Government was in a position to bring its influence to bear upon the way they would be treated. “The Opobo and Bonny traders, who were assisting the Government,” Moor wrote,

took the opportunity of seizing many domestic slaves to replace the numbers they have lost during the past years, but this is the usual form that native warfare takes, and as the position of the boys seized will in future be directly under the observation of the Government, their future lot will probably be much better than when with their former master.²⁴

On the women and children who were also seized, Moor said he would “inquire when at Opobo, and return such of them as it may appear advisable to their people and country,” that is to say, he was not even going to commit himself to returning all the women and children.²⁵ Apparently the secretary of state for foreign affairs disapproved of this conduct, and we are later told by H. L. Gallwey, writing at the time when he was the acting commissioner and consul-general for the protectorate, that “as the Vice-Consul of the Central Division,” into which Opobo and Bonny fell, he had taken “steps to see that the slaves . . . were returned to their former masters.”²⁶

Equally astounding is the fact that some five years later Sir Ralph Moor was to admit that the government was aware of the fact that the coastal chiefs and the major coastal traders had continued to buy slaves from the interior in order to augment the declining population of their houses and city-states. According to Moor, this decline came about partly because the environment

of the delta was by nature harsh and unhealthy and partly because Ijo women were generally averse to bearing children or at least to carrying many pregnancies, out of a fear of running what they considered the terrible risk of bearing twins. A disposition to pursue prostitution as a profession was said also to have something to do with this attitude. Moor justified the continued involvement of the coastal states in the internal slave trade on two grounds. The first was political. The house system and its chiefs were sorely needed for effective governance at the local level. The second ground was economic. Without the system and its chiefs, the expansion and growth of trade in the protectorate would come to grief. As we shall see later in this study, when it became impossible to further postpone the formal abolition of the slave trade and slavery in the protectorate, Moor had to develop two disingenuous pieces of legislation designed to make it possible for the city states not only to keep the slaves they already had, but also to continue to recruit new ones under the guise of apprenticeship.²⁷ This indulgent attitude toward the continued involvement in the slave trade of the delta states helps to explain how the city-state of Opobo was able to grow from 1,500 people in 1869 to 20,000 people in 1911. Dike and Ekejiuba reveal that Jaja and his chiefs and principal merchants pursued an active policy of demographic expansion through aggressive trading in slaves, especially in the adult slaves needed to strengthen the defense of the city-state—a policy that survived for decades after Jaja.²⁸

Let us now try and bring together the key points that emerge from this study at this stage. If it was trade that brought British business men to the Bight, it was the campaign against the slave trade that brought the British Government there, first in the form of the Preventive Squadron and then in the form of the squadron and the consul—the latter being at first an official whose status and duties in the Bight were clear neither to himself nor to those who appointed him, not to mention those (the indigenous middlemen traders and the European traders) among whom he was supposed to work. As time went on, the consul and the navy metamorphosed into formal government and governance, and the abolitionist movement into a catchall project known as the “civilising mission,” which gave broad scope for the imposition of a colonial system of relationships on the region and its peoples. In this larger system, the abolition of the slave trade became just one other collateral impact that was expected as a result of colonization. It became subsumed under a subproject known as the abolition of barbarous practices and superstitions. Any kind of resistance to British penetration inland or to the expansion of British influence in general was assumed to provide incontrovertible evidence for the existence of these demonized practices.

The effort to take the new regime into the interior was led in fact by the indigenous traders of the coast, who had no alternative to doing so since they lived on commerce and would suffer severe economic privations if they did not uphold legitimate trade, presumably at the expense of the slave trade. Their success in the effort to get their suppliers from the hinterland to

embrace legitimate trade was to some extent a measure of their success in the elimination of the earlier trade. Perhaps it should be made quite clear here that those communities situated on the banks of the middle and upper Cross River such as the Umon and the Agwa'agune (the Akunakuna of the colonial records) were also active in promoting the new economic regime at the expense of the old. Here we have the testimony of Sir Claude MacDonald, the first commissioner and consul-general himself. Writing to the Foreign Office in 1895 he reported as follows:

Mr. Moor makes mention of some Akunakuna men being killed by the people of Obubra. These Akunakuna people are very venturesome traders and go long distances in their canoes bringing down rubber and ivory and are therefore very useful in opening up the country. I presume they would be called "middlemen". Okurike is their second largest town; since the lesson they received in 1893 they have been most peaceful and loyal.²⁹

Coming second to these middlemen at the time in this regard were paid agents of the government—consuls, vice-consuls, and native political agents—who by means of treaty and military chastisement compelled the headstrong, who would not listen to or follow the example of the coastal traders, to fall in line. Then came the missionaries with their doctrine of the equality of all men before God and thus of the evil of treating human beings as chattels. In all this effort the European traders at the coast, especially those known as the old coasters, played no part, preferring to wait until the interior had been made safe for them and their business. Only the newcomers among the white traders, that is, those of them who sought to use the Niger waterway to reach what were perceived to be the romantic, rich, rolling lands of the Sudan, contributed anything here. In attempting to reach the Sudan, they began making their commercial presence felt all the way from Brass to Lokoja and beyond and thus established factories at places such as Onitsha and Asaba. In this way they began the process by which the western borders of our area of interest were made to begin at an early period the transition from the predominantly slave trade regime of a bad past to the new regime of legitimate trade.

Another point calls for attention here since it helps to explain the fact that in this period the effort to promote legitimate trade, which was supposed to end in the abolition of the slave trade, was concentrated along and around the rivers—the Niger, the Sombreiro, the Bonny/Opobo or lower Imo River, the Calabar, and the Cross River. The reasons for this are obvious. For one thing, it was mainly along and around these rivers that the slave trade had flowed in its heyday. For another, those who spearheaded this campaign, that is, the coastal middlemen, were river-faring people and their main means of travel and moving their wares was the canoe. The British on their side depended in this period on these rivers for communication. Yet, the kinds of river craft they had were not sufficiently adapted for use on these rivers,

except perhaps during the rainy season when the rivers were usually in full tide. This was one other reason why the Ijo men and the Efik men occupied a prominent place in the campaign at this stage, since their craft were fully adapted for use on these rivers and in the adjoining creeks. This terrain and its special requirements in terms of communications technology further help to explain the dependence by the colonial authorities on the middlemen and such members of the local elite as took appointments under them as political agents. Writing in 1895, Sir Claude MacDonald pointed out that “in a country where there is an open water way upon which armed launches and steamers can operate, the pacification and administration of the riverside population is comparatively easy; it is when mangrove creeks and dense bush have to be dealt with that the real difficulties commence.”³⁰ Thus, even during the rains the British still found themselves dependent on the middlemen, their canoes, and their “pull boys,” just as was the case in most of the delta during the low-water period. MacDonald also pointed out that even inland, white men could not operate effectively in areas of dense forest and bush, which again made them dependent on locals to a greater extent than they liked.³¹

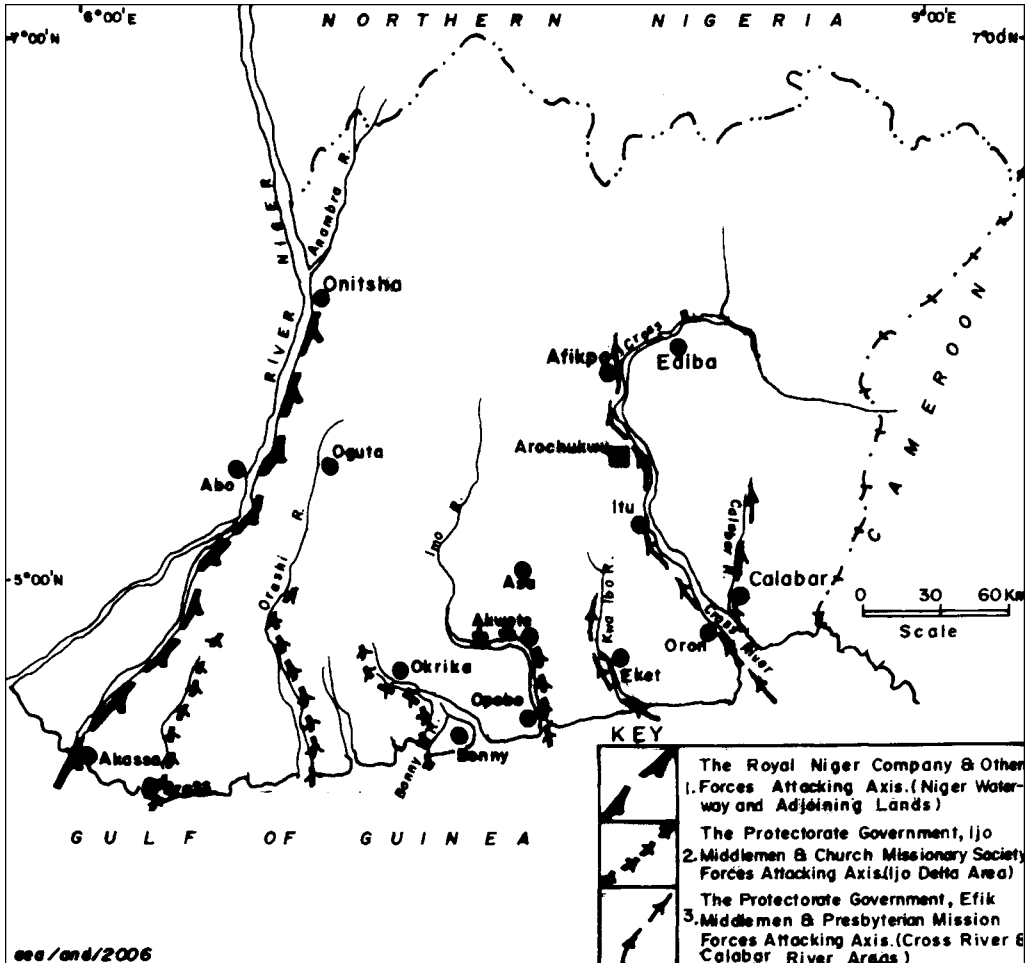
The dependence on the rivers and creeks at this time also explains the fact that the first political institutions created by the British to help consolidate the achievements registered in the process of penetrating the interior to spread the message against the slave trade and in favor of the legitimate trade, that is, the native courts and native councils, were established on these rivers or close to them. The excessive dependence on the middlemen of the coast introduced a paradoxical streak into British policy and action in the matter of the abolition of the slave trade. With regard to the middlemen, the British tended to condone continued slave keeping and slave buying because they believed this was necessary for the health of coastal society, whose support they sorely needed in local administration and the expansion of British commerce. Finally, we should note that the overall progress of the campaign against the iniquitous trade was slow indeed, since the peoples of the interior apparently did not immediately all fall for the arguments and antics of the Ijo, the Efik, and their white masters. Consequently, a significant measure of the old trade continued side by side with the new trade, not only in the far interior but also not far from the coastal states and the new government outposts. For instance, in 1901, Richard Morrissey of the Cross River Division reported to the commissioner and consul-general that

There are two places in the Cross River Division where slaves are sold openly in the market. These sales are held every fourth day in the market places of the towns of Itu and Asan, the former of which is situated immediately opposite to the Government station of the same name, on the left bank of the Cross River, while the town of Asan lies some 8 or 9 miles distant from Itu on the right bank of the Enyong Creek (a confluent of the Cross River).³²

By the date of this report (August 1901), the government station at Itu was at least six years old and yet such atrocities could still take place on its doorstep. Of the fact that his inveterate enemies, the Aro or Inokun, carried their slave trading business right to the doorstep of the Protectorate Sir Ralph Moor knew very well. Writing in 1901, just before the Aro Expedition, he reported:

The points at which these Inokuns come in contact for business purposes with the middleman carriers of trade goods and produce are (1) Various points on the Cross River, (2) To the north of Opobo around Azumini, Akwete and upper Kwa River, (3) To the north of New Calabar, (4) Around Oguta Lake, and (5) Some little distance to the east of (the) Niger.³³

Furthermore, the fragmentation of political authority in the whole region meant there were too many independent units to deal with. By the late 1890s, the patience of the British had started running out. The British had also made sure of the security of their base along the coast and thus could now safely contemplate rapid expansion in place of making haste slowly. It therefore came to be considered necessary to increase the use of muscular or warlike methods to overwhelm those peoples in the interior who were believed to be antagonistic to legitimate trade and free trade because of their attachment to the slave trade, cannibalism, and other forms of barbarism. With this we come to the next stage in the campaign, which featured the widespread application of what Bismarck called the methods of *blut und eisen*.



Map 2. The Aro Chuku Expedition of 1901-1902. © Ambrose Dibia of the Department of Geography, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

3

THE HINTERLAND PHASE I: BLOOD AND IRON, 1900–1914

In some important respects, aspects of the abolition of the slave trade in the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra can be said to have dovetailed into the abolition of the Atlantic segment and also into the reduction in the incidence of the traffic along the coast of the Bight itself. Indeed, the elimination of the export of slaves across the Atlantic, which, by and large, had been achieved by about 1860, was the first major blow to the internal traffic. Because the hinterland suppliers remained for decades after 1807 unaware of what was happening with the international market for their wares, or did not understand it, their machinery and mechanisms of supply remained fully operational, doing business as before, with the result that it did not take very long before the situation reached a point where such unrelenting activity began to damage the interest of the business. The damage took the form of a buildup in the number of slaves available for sale that was far in excess of what the internal market could profitably absorb. In other words, there was a glut, leading no doubt to a fall in the prices offered for slaves. In this regard, it should be remembered that it was as the abolitionist movement was getting into high gear that the jihad movement in Northern Nigeria, which started in 1804 and yielded a large harvest of slaves, many of whom were sent down the Niger for sale, began making its impact fully felt in the middle belt region which lies just north of and next to our region of interest.

The present writer drew attention in the early 1970s to this glut in the market for slaves in the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra following the abolition of the external slave trade, pointing out that

The decline of the Aro oligarchy goes back to Britain's decision in 1807 to abolish the slave trade. . . . British success in this matter between 1840 and 1860 dealt the first severe blow to Aro interests. . . . The cutting off of the foreign demand for slaves created a crisis for all groups involved in the trade. For the Aro the system they built up over the centuries for prosecuting this business—the Ibini Ukpabi oracle,

the strategic settlements throughout southeastern Nigeria, the alliance with the Abam, Ohafia and Edda—remained in full working condition. This meant that the Aro were still in a position to procure as many slaves as they did during the heyday of the traffic . . . All said and done the abolitionist movement . . . led to a fall in the price paid for slaves.¹

Working on the Western Igbo in the late 1980s, Ohadike came to a similar conclusion. “After 1840,” he wrote,

there was a dramatic drop in the price of slaves on the Lower Niger, which coincided with the period when the demand for palm oil was expanding rapidly. The slave trade was diminishing for a number of reasons. First, the presence of British naval patrols on the coast of Southern Nigeria discouraged slave export. Second, an over-supply existed: the regions that supplied slaves to the Lower Niger continued to do so with increasing efficiency even after the closure of the overseas markets. In addition the Islamic reform movement launched from Sokoto in 1804 soon spread to other parts of the grassland belts of Nigeria generating war on an unprecedented scale and yielding thousands of captives. Each day hundreds of slaves were ferried down the Niger for sale, while thousands more were displayed in the Kano, Zaria, Bida and Lokoja markets. Thus by the second half of the nineteenth century the slave markets of Northern Nigeria and the Lower Niger had been glutted.²

This glut in the slave markets of the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra was later made worse by the developments we analyzed in the preceding chapter, which, to make a long story short, went some distance toward detaching the Lower Niger region, the coastal states of the Bight, and the communities of the Cross River valley from Calabar to Itu from full participation in the trade through converting these zones into bases from which the coming assault on the interior was going to be made.

Evidence for this theory of an increasing glut in the slave market abounds. Field investigation into this matter in the early 1960s by the present author yielded the information that it led in the southeastern Nigerian region to an unprecedented increase in the incidence of human sacrifice in connection with the propitiation of the gods and the burying of the prominent dead, as families which previously could not afford such a high-cost project as human sacrifice or the giving of human beings to the gods now found it within their reach, while those families which were really rich competed with one another in the number of slaves each killed for its dead or used to placate the gods.³ There is also documentary evidence that slave traders in this area found it increasingly difficult to dispose of their wares. The Aro, for instance, began finding more slaves on their hands than they could profitably dispose of. By the last decade or so of the nineteenth century, this situation had become very serious. Thus it is reported that they had found on their hands around 1899 a batch of some 136 slaves they could not dispose of; these slaves took the opportunity of a scare caused by a military action carried out by the Protectorate

Government in an Annang village to make good their escape. According to the men's story, they were at one point up to 800 in number. But some had died and some had been disposed of in other ways before the opportunity occurred for them to escape. There is still more evidence of the impact of the glut on Aro slave trading business. Reporting from the upper Cross River a few months before the Aro Expedition, Richard Morrisey noted that

The Inokun Aro Juju town of Iboom known to us as Aro Chuku is at times the scene of horrible fetish rites. At the season of the New Yams (in December) slaves are sacrificed in dozens—and portions of the flesh of the victims eaten, and two years ago at the death of an Aro Chief named Oko-Voge one hundred people were beheaded. The awful spectacle was witnessed by the Enyong Chiefs, and others not natives of the Inokun country and no attempt at secrecy was made in carrying out the wholesale butchery.⁴

It is our view that such reckless extravagance with their human wares would not have been possible without the glut we are talking about here. From the Lower Niger and the lands on the right bank of that river, we have still more supporting evidence. Ohadike gives us statistics of individual slave holdings in this period that would have been unthinkable in the years when slaves could be exported. "Some like the Obi Ossai," he writes, "kept over three hundred slaves, his son Chukwuma had over two hundred, and his brother, Aje, had a hundred. In 1841 MacGregor Laird reported that he visited the plantation of an Aboh woman who owned over two hundred slaves whom she kept to collect palm oil and cultivate yams."⁵ It is also on record that when Chief Nana of the Benin River was overthrown in 1894, he was found to have had over two thousand slaves.

Thus the abolition of the external slave trade and the depression of the coastal segment of the traffic was, as already mentioned, not only the first blow, but also a very severe blow, to the internal traffic. The depression in price caused by the glut would have caused various kinds of reaction among former votaries. It would help to explain the quick gravitation (at least in part) of those of them in favored locations already mentioned in the previous chapter—the Lower Niger valley, the Cross River valley, and the immediate hinterland of the coastal Ijo middlemen—to the new lines of business, that is, to the harvesting and marketing of palm produce, or the distribution of imported European wares, or the cultivation and marketing of food crops as was seen along the Lower Niger flood plains and parts of the Cross River valley. Some were said to have de-emphasized slave trading, even while hanging on to it with one hand, and adopted one or another of these new lines of business. For the Aro, there were other more general consequences. For instance, the escape in 1899 of the large contingent of slaves they could not dispose of led to the exposure of some of their tricks and the secrets of the Ibini Ukpabi oracle. As the escapees were helped by the government to return to their

homes they were encouraged to tell the story of what they had been through and seen, and thus to expose the Aro and their god. According to Sir Ralph Moor, the commissioner and consul-general of the protectorate:

Since this event the refugees have been talking freely in their country and have exposed to all the tribes around the fraud of the Long Juju with the result that the profit of this nefarious form of priest-craft will gradually be curtailed.⁶

Again and again the Aro, in stating their grievances against the government, pointed out that these changes had ruined for them the market for slaves. They told an agent of the government in 1899 that “Their trade in slaves has been to a great extent ruined as the Government has put an end to human sacrifice and prevents, as far as possible, the exchange and sale of slaves.”⁷ On another occasion, the divisional commissioner for Opobo reported: “I saw an Aro man at Azumini and he informed me that the stopping of human sacrifice striking at their slave trade, the difficulty of obtaining cap guns, and the great falling off in attendance of big waterside chiefs at the Aro Long Juju meant such a large pecuniary loss to the Aro tribe that all the families have assembled and sworn to prevent the Government from advancing any further into the interior.”⁸ There is still more evidence of this progressive decline of the internal slave trade. According to Richard Morrissey, the Itu slave market, which he reported on in 1901, displayed about twenty slaves for sale each market day. Sir Ralph Moor commented that this figure showed what changes for good the existence of the Protectorate Government had brought about within the space of ten to fifteen years, for when he had encountered that market some nine years earlier, about one hundred slaves were available for sale on each market day.⁹

If the abolition of the export trade in slaves was a telling blow to the whole business of the slave trade, it can be described as only an indirect blow to the internal traffic. On the other hand, the reduction of the traffic along the shores of the Bight, in the Lower Niger valley, and in the valley of the Cross River was not only a second blow but a direct one, because the trade of the Bight was part and parcel of the hinterland trade just as it had been part and parcel of the Atlantic segment. The third blow, which was also a direct blow, was the mobilization by the British of the middlemen of the coast as part of its motley army of legitimate traders, free traders, and abolitionists for the assault on the hinterland, indeed, as its forward troops and pathfinders as we have shown. The fourth blow was equally direct. It was also the most devastating of the attacks by the Protectorate Government against the internal slave trade. This blow was that of military force, of conquest, the *ultima ratio* in all arguments and contests. This blow had been part of the abolitionist equation from the beginning in the form of the Preventive Squadron. Combined with bribery and diplomacy, it had won over the nations of Europe and their slave traders. It had also been used to cow the city-states in the seven decades or so

before the onset of our period. During our period, it was the argument that was used to silence Jaja of Opobo in 1887, Nana Olomu of the Benin River in 1894, the communities of the Cross River valley from the estuary to Afikpo between 1888 and 1895, and the communities of the Lower Niger between 1885 and 1899. Whatever qualms Britain may have had about the wholesale use of this argument in bringing about abolition and enthroning legitimate trade in the hinterland of the Bight may be said to have been scotched as early as 1889 by the General Act of the Brussels Conference, which recommended it as the sovereign remedy for the slave trade in the interior of Africa. According to Obaro Ikime:

That conference urged on Britain and the other signatories of its General Act the progressive organization of the administrative, judicial, religious and military services in the African territories placed under the sovereignty or protectorate of “civilized” nations as an effective means of suppressing the slave trade. It recommended the setting up of “strongly occupied stations” in the hinterland of the territories controlled by the signatory powers. It called for the mounting of expeditions to suppress repressive actions and to secure the safety of highways.¹⁰

There is no shadow of doubt, of course, that as shown here already, and as many students of modern Nigerian history have emphasized, Britain had been implementing aspects of this broad policy in the Bight from the days of Johnston and Hewett, that is, even before the signing of the General Act of the Brussels Conference.¹¹ But from about 1899 onward, Britain decided to implement the entire package of measures recommended by the General Act in order to fully introduce the reign of the *pax Britannica*, not so much because Britain was seething with passion for the liquidation of the slave trade and slavery but because it was anxious to bring about the unhindered reign and triumph of the new trade in order to make its presence in the Bight and its hinterland profitable. But, of course, as has already been said, the dawn of such a new era would also, it was believed or hoped or both, spell the doom of the abhorred slave trade and its usual aftermath, slavery. The decision to use the sword in dealing with the states and societies of the hinterland of the Bight was due to two factors. One was the fact that the men on the spot and their superiors back home had grown impatient with the slow progress of the imperial frontier associated with the earlier mode of advance which depended on the work of the coastal middlemen, the consuls, and the native political agents who sought to sell the new regime to the peoples of the interior by means of propaganda and peace treaties. The other factor was that the infant protectorate felt that not only did it now literally have a place on which to stand and from which to shake “the world” of the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra, but also that it had built up its strength and resources sufficiently to adopt a more robust approach to the problems that faced it in that hinterland. In Anene’s words,

The Protectorate Government under Sir Ralph Moor, the High Commissioner, was well placed for the last major expedition that would leave no doubts that the British Administration of Southern Nigeria had become a reality. The finances were good, even showing a surplus of revenue over expenditure to the amount of more than £22,000.00. The long troublesome district of the Kwa Ibo River and its turbulent Ibibio inhabitants had been pacified and government control was firmly buttressed with detachments of troops at Eket and Azumini. The overthrow of the Benin Kingdom was tantamount to almost complete control of the Western Division.¹²

As already shown, the official representatives of Britain in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland had long since downgraded the abolitionist movement as a determinant of official policy. But for some strange reason, perhaps largely one of propaganda, on the eve of this military jump into the hinterland, the Protectorate Government presented its action as first and foremost, if not entirely, a crusade against the slave trade and slave dealers. Many Nigerian historians of this region and of this period have sought to expose the hypocrisy of this position. Even the Colonial Office, commenting on the case made by its men on the spot, who sought to persuade it that this position was correct, described the impending campaign as one “which has already been decided to be necessary on more general grounds.”¹³ For purposes of this study, it is perhaps pardonable to assume that Sir Ralph Moor and his men woke up from sleep on the eve of this major change in policy and in method of advance into the interior of the Bight and restored the campaign against the slave trade to the position of priority which the antislavery movement could be said to have occupied in British policy toward West Africa in the period 1807 to 1830. Indeed, from about 1900 onward, every military campaign undertaken in the interior of the Bight for the purpose of bringing the people under undisputed British control was justified on the twin grounds of suppressing the slave trade and all the barbarous customs supposedly linked to it and creating conditions favorable to British trade, no matter what the precipitating *casus belli* was. For example, this was done with respect to the Ibibio Patrol of early 1904.¹⁴ It was also the case with the Bende-Onitsha Expedition of 1906, which was described as the largest military operation undertaken by the protectorate since the Aro Chukwu Expedition of 1901–2. According to Sir Walter Egerton, from 1906 the governor of the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, this expedition dealt with a large stretch of territory that was “very thickly populated by tribes more barbarous and less intelligent than any hitherto met with in Southern Nigeria.” But according to Major Trenchard, who led the expedition, “its objective was to bring under Government control the country lying south of latitude 6° 30' N bounded on the west by Oka-Oguta road, on the east by a line joining Afikpo and Abakaliki, and on the south by the Bende-Owerri road in which slave dealing and human sacrifice existed and which was unknown country closed to trade.” When the expedition swung round to also deal with the Brass area, it was said that it did so in order to “suppress repeated acts of piracy, seizing and slave dealing in the various creeks which run through this district.”¹⁵

The fact was that by 1901 Sir Ralph Moor had come up with his own (for those days) fairly comprehensive sociology of the ways and means by which slaves were procured for sale in the protectorate under his control. According to Moor, there were five such methods, the first three being related to violence and connected with the Aro, to wit, seizing and kidnapping by professional raiding bands, capture in “inter-tribal” wars, and seizure through the Long Juju. These three methods, he felt, could easily be abolished by the method of blood and iron, which would teach the people a lasting lesson, disarm them through the capture and destruction of their guns, and install a sustainable regime of law and order centered on courts and constables. Also, by promoting legitimate trade, it would offer the former raiders and freebooters a means of livelihood other than slave raiding and slave trading.¹⁶ This simple program was bought by Moor’s successors, which explains the fact that military expeditions and patrols remained for nearly twenty years the stock-in-trade of the colonial administration in the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra and its major instrument for dealing with the problem of slave trading in the region. Moor’s study of how slaves were procured also helps to explain something that has baffled historians of this region and of this period—the fact that the Aro Expedition was planned and executed on such a large scale, and that it was conceived as the step that, if successfully taken, would give the colonial government undisputed control over all of southeastern Nigeria and thus deal with the problem of the procuring and marketing of slaves once and for all.

In keeping with the government’s belief that the conquest of the hinterland was a campaign against the slave trade and slave dealers, one of the steps it took to arm itself for what it saw as a great event was to draw up a proclamation against slave dealing which it was to apply either in part or in full to such parts of the protectorate as came, in its view, under its effective control following the expedition. Section 3 of Proclamation No. 5 of 1901 made it an offense, punishable under the law, to engage in slave dealing within the protectorate or any part of it to which the proclamation or any part of the proclamation applied. Section 4 gave details of what, in the opinion of the government, constituted slave dealing, by providing that

Whosoever shall do or shall attempt to do any of the acts hereinafter mentioned, that is to say:-

1. Deal or trade in, purchase, sell, barter, transfer, or take any slave within the limits, to which this Proclamation at any time applies;
2. Deal or trade in, purchase, sell, barter, transfer, or take within the limits, to which this Proclamation at any time applies, any person in order or so that such person should be held or treated as a slave;
3. Place or receive within the limits, to which this Proclamation at any time applies, any person in servitude as a pledge or security for debt, whether then due and

- owing, or to be incurred or contingent, whether under the name of a pawn, or by whatever other name such person may be called or known;
4. Convey or induce any person to come within the limits, to which this Proclamation at any time applies, in order or so that such person should be dealt or traded in, purchased, sold, bartered, transferred or become a slave, or be placed in servitude as a pledge or security for debt;
 5. Convey or send or induce any person to go out of the limits, to which this Proclamation at any time applies, in order or so that such person should be dealt or traded in, purchased, sold, bartered, transferred, or become a slave, or be placed in servitude as a pledge or security for debt;
 6. Enter into any contract or agreement with or without consideration for doing any of the acts or accomplishing any of the purposes hereinabove enumerated, shall and shall be deemed to have committed the offence of slave dealing.¹⁷

Section 5 provided that an accessory to any or all of these acts should be regarded as guilty of the principal offense and could be tried separately or together with the principal offender. Anyone convicted of contravening the provisions of the proclamation could be sentenced to seven years imprisonment or a fine or both. Section 7 provided that any person brought to any part of the protectorate to which the proclamation applied, either as a slave or to be dealt with as a slave, became free through the operation of the proclamation. Section 9 declared void all contracts that could be interpreted or understood as promoting or intending to promote slave dealing.¹⁸

After this, Sir Ralph Moor proceeded to define the objectives of the expedition, which was expected by the government to lay the entire hinterland of the Bight of Biafra, or most of it, at the government's feet and thus achieve the abolition of the internal slave trade at the conclusion of its operations. There were six objectives, and they were all related to slave trade and slavery. The objectives were as follows:

1. To put a stop to slave dealing and the slave trade generally with a view to the Slave Dealing Proclamation No. 5 of 1901 being enforced throughout the entire territories as from first of January next.
2. To abolish the juju hierarchy of the Aro tribe, which by superstition and fraud causes much injustice among the coast tribes generally and is opposed to the establishment of Government. The power of the priesthood is also employed in obtaining natives for sale as slaves and it is essential to finally break it.
3. To open up the country of the entire Aro to civilization.
4. To induce the natives to engage in legitimate trade.
5. To introduce a currency in lieu of slaves, brass rods and other forms of native currency and to facilitate trade transactions.
6. To eventually establish a labour market as a substitute to the present system of slavery.¹⁹

Thus, Proclamation No. 5 of 1901 was a major policy statement and commitment by the government in the matter of the abolition of the slave trade and slavery in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland. It became the main legal weapon under whose canopy that goal was to be pursued and achieved. But to create the environment which would make it possible to apply this policy and also to enhance its impact, the government felt compelled by circumstances to choose military conquest as its first step. Military conquest had a number of associated advantages from the point of view of the government. In the first place, it would deliver a major shock to the traffic, to all those involved in it, and to all the institutions associated with it either as means of recruitment or as receivers of the end product, and might even bring about the collapse of some of these institutions beyond the point of recovery. In the second place, it would teach all and sundry that the new rulers meant business and that the old order was dead, having given way to a new order. In the third place, it would create an atmosphere in which all the different elements embodied in the *pax Britannica*—such as the Christian missions, Western education, commerce, urbanization, and the massive coming and going of large sections of the population—would flourish and, through their direct and indirect corrosive impact on native society, aid the erosion of the base of the evil traffic as well as the base of other associated barbarous customs. Thus the issuing of Proclamation No. 5 of 1901 and the military expedition of 1901–2 which followed can be regarded not only as the first but also as the most important direct statement made by the colonial administration on the subject of the slave trade and slavery since it came into formal existence in 1885.

Meanwhile, for reasons and by mental processes which have been alluded to already in this study and which have been discussed by this writer and many other scholars in other works,²⁰ the British had come to believe that the Aro were synonymous with all the problems they faced in their bid to take control of the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra—slave trading, slavery (or slave keeping), obstruction of the expansion of legitimate commerce, opposition to the spread of missionary enterprise, resistance to the abolition of human sacrifice and cannibalism, and the elimination of the regime of oracles and witches. In a word, they had come to convince themselves that the hinterland of the Bight was an Aro empire of sorts and that to defeat the Aro was to smash this obscurantist empire and deal a death blow to the institutions of the slave trade and slavery there. It was for this reason that they assembled a large army of imperial soldiers which was designated the Aro Field Force and which was made to march on Aro Chukwu in four converging columns from different points of the compass and, after overrunning Ibom, the supposed imperial metropolis of the Aro, undertake military promenades round and about this large “empire” to overawe those in its supposed provinces. Starting on 28 November 1901, this assignment was accomplished in five months, by the end of which the people living in an area measuring some 6,000 square miles had been overawed

or browbeaten or both. This was an enormous achievement for the government in only five months.²¹ By treaty and diplomacy alone, it would probably have taken about a decade, bearing in mind the political geography of the zone, which was found to be the direct opposite of the political geography which had informed the planning and execution of the Aro Expedition. This discovery supported the new policy of fighting the slave trade and associated barbarous practices by means of military expeditions, columns, patrols, and escorts. Dr. P. A. Talbot, political officer and later anthropological officer, sought to compile a comprehensive list of the expeditions against slave dealing, cannibalism, human sacrifice, and obstruction of legitimate trade in the period 1900 to 1914 in the area lying to the rear of the Bight of Biafra and came up with a tally of approximately forty. He did not record those expeditions which came between 1914 and 1926.²²

Thus, just as the gunboats and the bombardments with which they visited the trading states of the coast had been largely instrumental in installing in the Bight a new regime openly antagonistic to the slave trade and committed to legitimate trade, military force and blandishments were also largely responsible for installing a similar regime in the hinterland. The Protectorate Government was in no doubt about this. In one of its reports to the secretary of state for the colonies after the Aro Expedition, it described the military action as one directed against “the last stronghold of slavery” in the territory under its control, and then proceeded to claim that as a result of what it had achieved, the protectorate “was freed forever from the evils of slave raiding and slave dealing on an organised scale.”²³ Later in the same report, the government made the same claim again in different words, thus showing how mightily pleased it was with itself. “The military operations which were brought to a successful close in 1902,” said the report, “destroyed the system of slave making. . . and the dreaded juju oracle ceased forever to exercise its baneful influence.”²⁴ Subsequent events, as will be noted in this study, were to show that this crowing in triumph was a little too early, as the problem of slave dealing, not to mention the more resilient institution of slavery, in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland was to follow the colonial administration like its shadow almost till the end of its tenure.

But there can be no doubt that military conquest was by far the severest single blow the colonial administration dealt against the slave trade in the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra. For one thing, it was with the successful capture of Aro Chukwu on Christmas Day 1901 that the government felt able to make Proclamation No 5 of that year, abolishing slave trading and slave keeping, applicable to all the nooks and corners of the protectorate. “Whereas by Section 2 of ‘The Slave-dealing Proclamation, 1901’,” wrote Sir Ralph Moor with the usual pardonable legal pomposity,

the High Commissioner may at any time by order published in the Gazette apply the said Proclamation as respects the whole or any of its provisions from a date

mentioned in such Order to such part or parts of the Protectorate as in his opinion is or are under the effective control of the government.

And whereas all parts of the Protectorate are in my opinion under the effective control of the Government;

Now, therefore, I Ralph Denham Rayment Moor, Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of St Michael and St George, H.B.M. High Commissioner for the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, in exercise of the power in that behalf in the said Proclamation contained, do hereby order that the said Proclamation as respects the whole of its provisions shall from the first day of January, 1902, apply to all parts of the Protectorate.²⁵

Military conquest was the ultimate basis of the *pax Britannica* in colonial south-eastern Nigeria. Therefore, if British colonialism abolished the slave trade and slavery in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland, that abolition was the work of military conquest. In this regard, it should be borne in mind that just as the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria was hammering the Igbo, the Ibibio, and the Ogoja peoples over this matter, Lugard was also hammering the peoples of the middle belt, who had in the past helped to feed the southeastern region with slaves. Lugard's wars in the North had also resulted in substantially reducing the supply of slaves from that rich traditional source.

Beyond all this, other elements of the cocktail or regime known as the *pax Britannica*, which in totality was antagonistic to slave trading and slave keeping, could now be installed in the interior, and were indeed installed as had been the case along the Bight or coast for about a decade. Thus the entire area was apportioned into divisions and districts. Each of these units had its headquarters, in which were established the usual paraphernalia of the government presence—commissioner's courts (formerly known as consular courts), native councils, police and court messenger posts, and in some cases military posts. Each district or division also had outside its headquarters native courts which, as already mentioned, were judicial and executive arms of government of the same character as the native councils but differed from the latter because they were not presided over by a European political officer and consequently had more limited powers. If the sheer fact of military conquest had dislocated and disorganized whatever routes, markets, and slave traders' organizations had existed in the period before the expedition, the installation of these administrative units and systems and their personnel helped to perpetuate and consolidate that dislocation and disruption. Those who were inclined to defy the government in this regard had, in many cases, to start afresh in building up their connections and contacts. As time went on, these new centers of British influence and interest came to operate as oases of Western civilization in a presumed desert of barbarism. From them, civilizing influences radiated all around. They were also centers to which would-be victims of the old order could flee for protection and help. The courts in particular brought about a reduction in, though not the total elimination (certainly not immediately) of, the number of those who consulted the oracles for the

solution of certain categories of problems, and thus reduced slave recruitment through the oracles. On this point it has been noted that

the institutions of local rule . . . especially the native courts turned out to be among the most effective counter measures against the Aro and their Long Juju [from the standpoint of recruiting slaves] They provided an alternative and parallel means for securing redress. They were cheaper in many respects than an appeal to the Aro oracle. A few shillings were enough to secure the intervention of a native court. Whereas it took months to consult an oracle, at most a man did a full day's journey to reach the court under whose jurisdiction he lived. The court offered a man an opportunity to argue out a case with his adversary face to face, unlike the oracle whose proceedings were shrouded in mystery.²⁶

Military conquest also cleared the way for the traders and the missionaries who had been hovering around the estuaries of the major rivers and creeks—around such places as Calabar, Oron, Opobo, Bonny, Kalabari, Brass, Aboh, Onitsha, and so on—to surge into the interior and make their contribution to the abolition of the slave trade, slavery, and other inhuman practices which existed in different centers of Igbo, Ibibio, and Ogoja culture. With this development we begin to hear not just of Calabar, Itu, Opobo, Brass, and Onitsha, as formerly, but also of Oron, Ikot Ekpene, Uyo, Aba, Umuahia, Owerri, Okigwe, Orlu, Enugu, Okwoga (later Nsukka), Udi, Awgu, Agbani, Abakaliki, Afikpo, Ogoja, Obubra, and so on as centers from which radiated the new civilization. Writing on the invasion of Igboland by the missionaries, Ayandele saw the turning point as having come when the secular arm of the British colonial regime visited the Igbo with “fire and sword” during the campaigns against the Ekumeku and the Aro.²⁷ The same point can be brought up in explanation of the penetration of Igboland by the traders as well as in explanation of the penetration of Ibibioland and Ogoja by the traders and the missionaries. Thus, whatever the contributions the traders and the missionaries made to the war against the slave trade and slave keeping in this area was, in large measure, a by-product of the success of the military actions taken against those institutions by the colonial government in the period after 1900.

In his statement of the objectives of the Aro Expedition, Sir Ralph Moor had said the conquest of the interior would enable him to take a number of other, ancillary steps against the slave trade and slavery. And it surely did. He said it would enable him to bring into being a new labor regime that would replace the old, which he believed, wrongly it should be said, had depended almost entirely on the slave trade and slavery. This is a very large issue in the history of early colonial Southern Nigeria, but here we are only interested in how it affected the campaign against the slave trade. Moor was convinced that the trading states of the Bight of Biafra provided the largest market for slaves in the region, not only because of their massive involvement in the expanding new trade but also because of their inability to maintain an upward trend in

their population dynamics, an issue we have already discussed. Thus, for him, an important issue in the campaign against the slave trade was how to deal with this apparently insatiable demand. Two modes of approach recommended themselves to Moor. The first was to ensure that the labor that the city-states already had, in the form of members of the trading houses who were mostly slaves, was retained. At the time there was the danger that the slaves might seize the opportunity created by the measures against slave dealing as well as those arising from the spread of the new commerce, Christianity, and other aspects of Western culture to assert their independence and make their escape. It was to ensure that this did not happen that the government in 1901 issued the Native House Rule Proclamation, which conferred on the slave population of the city-states the rights of freemen while at the same time tightening the authority and control of the heads of houses over the members. With this measure Sir Ralph Moor hoped to stabilize the population of the coastal states somewhat and dampen that demand for new hands that helped to sustain the trade in slaves from the interior to the coast. But he knew that since the coastal population appeared to be in no condition to meet its future manpower needs from natural growth for reasons already given, there would always be a need for more hands which would have to be met from the interior. It was to provide for these extra hands, without recourse to slave dealing of the old kind, that the government passed the Master Servant Proclamation of 1903, which made it possible and legal for the coastal middlemen to go into the interior to recruit young people as apprentice traders or for other types of employment. Each apprentice was to serve for up to twelve years, and the transaction was to be embodied in formal contracts. During the period of the apprenticeship, the parent or guardian of the child in question was to be paid an agreed sum as compensation for the labor lost. The two proclamations were an ingenious way of apparently abolishing the slave trade and slavery in the delta without actually abolishing them. Not surprisingly, they won the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria a very bad press at the time and have continued to attract acid comments from historians of the region and period.²⁸

Also, as part of the solution to the labor issue Sir Ralph Moor had to issue, in 1903, the Roads and Creeks Proclamation, which empowered the government to recruit through chiefs recognized by it the labor it required to make the creeks and rivers suitable for traffic by clearing them of obstructions, and to build and maintain a modern road network system to take the place of the old footpaths which were considered not only inefficient for modern traffic but also as better suited for slave dealing. Two aspects of this measure were important from the point of view of the war on slave trading and slavery.

In the first place, it was on this unpaid conscript labor that the government depended, between 1903 and 1926, for the building and maintaining of much of what may be called the basic road network of the former Eastern Region of Nigeria. This conscript labor also contributed to the building of the railway

from Port Harcourt to Enugu and beyond. Under this regime, an adult male was required to give six days work in each quarter. The proclamation brought such a burden of work to the adult male population, the class of people who otherwise would have been the ones engaged in slave raiding and kidnapping, that it must have contributed to a redirection of people's attention—that is, to a turning away of attention from many traditional pursuits including slave raiding and slave trading. This was all the more so as the work on roads and rivers was very tedious and associated with many brutalities since people were regularly flogged for absence or for alleged laziness. Indeed, so dreaded was this work that adult males took to hiding from their chiefs and anyone suspected to be an agent of the government. In this climate, certainly, slave trading and slave catching, with their extra risks, would not have occurred to many people who in the pre-1900 world might have thought of them, even if only as a diversion during the non-farming period.²⁹

Then there was the second aspect. This work based on conscription did not discriminate between free and unfree, unlike the situation in the period before 1900, when it would have been unthinkable to conscript a free man to work. Nor were the freeborn spared the brutal treatment to which workers were subjected at the place of work. Conscripted labor was thus a kind of social leveler. It was, indeed, worse than a social leveler, especially on occasions when a man and his slave or his father's or mother's slave were put in the same labor gang and subjected to the same brutal treatment. The fact that one could be conscripted just like one's slave and be subjected to similar brutal treatment seriously undermined the social prestige value of acquiring and owning a slave or slaves, even if it did nothing to undermine the economic value. The roads that came into existence in consequence of the forced labor worked against the slave trade in their own way. "Since the roads did not necessarily follow the old trade routes," it has been pointed out, "and the administrative headquarters as well as the native court centres were not established at or by the side of Aro settlements, traffic gradually but steadily moved away from the Aro (slave) trade route network."³⁰ But, of course, this worked both ways. The lonelier these tracks became, the more ideal they became for use by diehard slave traders and kidnappers.

Moor had also said that the success of the Aro Expedition would enable him to introduce modern currency in place of the native currencies which were anchored to some extent on slave trading and slavery. Not only were slaves used as currency, but the bulky nature of the traditional currencies—cowries, copper rods, manilas, and so on—made slave trading and slavery necessary. At times, after selling their goods in the market, traders who would not otherwise deal in slaves were compelled to buy slaves to enable them to carry their bulky money. Moor had written about this in 1897:

The use of brass rods and manilas leads to a waste of time in counting and of energy in carrying such a currency about the country. About 30/- worth of brass rods or

manilas is a load for one man. The currency gives rise to a greater evil than the loss entailed by counting and carrying, which is that it tends to create a market for slavery. Native middlemen get their trade materials carried to the interior markets by free labour and there convert it into due proportions of brass rods and slaves, the latter to carry the former.³¹

This was one reason why, in another despatch on the same issue, Moor referred to slaves as “a sort of ambulating currency transporting together with themselves the native currencies.” This was an issue to which Moor came back again and again in his communication with his superiors in London and he insisted that the two issues—the campaign against the slave trade and slavery and the creation of a new economic regime through the introduction of a new currency—must be taken together. “The question of a new currency,” he wrote on another occasion,

is in my mind so closely connected with that of slavery that the latter cannot in my opinion be effectively dealt with until some sound currency system has been introduced. If slavery is to be done away with it is essential that a labour market is established. Means must be provided for paying the labourers which again necessitates the introduction of a currency. Doing away with slavery means revolutionizing the entire economic conditions of the country. . . . The immediate introduction of currency is in my view one of the most important provisions that require to be made and I have consequently delayed writing an answer to your despatch until I had reported on the slavery question in my despatch of the 7th instant with which I suggest this despatch may be read.³²

Moor had introduced English money along the coast back in 1898, but its use spread very slowly indeed, since at first the hinterland traders would not accept it from their coastal customers such as the Efik and the Ijo. But during the Aro Expedition, Moor seized the opportunity offered by the large army of soldiers who went into the interior to introduce the new currency there. Every paid service rendered to the expedition was paid for in the new currency. The soldiers were also paid their salaries in the new currency, which meant that their spending was also in the new currency. After the expedition, all the troops used to garrison different parts of the conquered territory continued to be paid their salaries in the new currency, which of course they continued to force on the natives. What was more, the high commissioner was in 1902 able to issue a proclamation that for the first time legally introduced the currency into the entire protectorate. It also fixed rates of exchange between the new currency and the old currencies, understandably placing the new at an advantage over the old and thus giving it a good chance of taking over the economy in time. This was another blow aimed at the slave trade and slavery, for which the conquest of the hinterland helped to prepare the way. However, the protracted battle between the new and the old currencies continued until the 1940s before the new currency won, the cowrie

being the last of the old currencies to disappear. This was contrary to Moor's expectations. While arguing the case for the new currency in 1901, he had deposed that "I am of opinion that in the course of six or seven years after the introduction of a suitable cash currency these old forms would have disappeared."³³

Above all, it must be stated emphatically that the conquest we are talking about, that is, the British conquest of the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra, was, for the people living in the area, a conquest of such a special kind that it occasioned "shock and awe." It not only represented the use of social force on a scale and in a manner they had never seen before and could never have imagined but, as Chinweizu Chinweizu has noted, it was also "conquest in detail"³⁴—each village-group or town that chose to fight was taken on in turn and routed. Beyond that, it was brutal and heartless beyond anything the people had ever experienced. It was accompanied at almost every stage with the burning and sacking of towns and villages, the deposition and banishment of leaders, and in places the wholesale slaughter of domestic animals and the destruction of farms. There were also hangings of so-called ringleaders of resistance. After the Aro Expedition, some of the Aro leaders were summarily tried and hanged for murders they were said to have committed before Aro Chukwu was conquered. In the same manner, one Okori Torti, an Aro who was said to have masterminded a bloody raid on the town of Obegu, which was in a treaty relationship with the Protectorate Government, was tried with his associates and the whole group hanged.³⁵ Also during the expedition, some of the troops had caught and dealt with an Aro slave trader at Ifuho near Ikot Ekpene. Walter Ofonagoro has described this incident:

One such slave trader Ukpan Inokun, who operated in the Annang country between Ifuho and Ikot Ekpene, was hunted down by British forces during the Aro Expedition. Udo Akpabio explains how the expeditionary forces dealt with the man: "The white man had been informed that this man was hiding at Ifuho. They caught him, fastened ropes round his ankles, and he was hung on a tree with his head downwards. They cut off his head and went away."³⁶

Writing about the Western Igbo, Ohadike noted that "As organizers of the political up-rising [known as the Ekumeku], the chiefs were singled out for severe punishment. Many were shot, captured or sent to prison" Also according to Ohadike, "In 1906 when some clans in the Agbo District protested against the incessant use of forced labour, several hundreds of them were shot by colonial troops."³⁷ During one of the expeditions against the Qua Iboe (Annang), nineteen towns were burnt to the ground. Before executions took place, the government would usually invite observers from within a radius of 15 to 20 miles and later enjoin them to spread the story of what they had seen. On one such meeting in 1898, Major Gallwey, acting high commissioner and consul-general, reported:

On the 13th of September Major Vice-Consul Leonard held a meeting at Obegu, at which the representatives of 5 countries and 47 towns were present, to the number at least of 5,000 people, some of whom were quite unknown to Government and situated a distance nearly 50 miles from Akwette. This fact in itself is a convincing testimony of the wisdom shown by the Government in mounting an expedition against Ehea for stopping the trade to the interior by seizing people going to or returning from the markets.³⁸

Indeed, some of the early colonial officers have survived in the traditions of the people as by-words for brutality. An example was H. M. Douglas at Owerri, also known among his white colleagues as “Black Douglas,” whom the Ahiara people thought they were going after when they slaughtered poor Dr. Stewart, a medical officer.³⁹ Another was a Mr. Heron in Nsukka District, who earned himself the nickname *Otikpo Obodo*, meaning “the destroyer or wrecker of villages.”⁴⁰ In Okigwi District or Division there was a political officer known as *Ogba Aji Aka* (“the man with the hairy hands”) who was also known as a “hard taskmaster.”⁴¹ However, our interest in this matter here is in its implication for the subject of our study. Harsh punishments taught all and sundry that the new masters were not to be toyed with. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the shock and fear induced by this ruthless approach to the problem of conquest and consolidation must have contributed to the fact that, apparently, as soon as the British presence in the interior came to be seen by the people as a reality, many participants in the illegal trade backed out and sought to *supplement* their living from other sources. The word “supplement” has been used advisedly. It is clear that at no stage was there any group here whose livelihood depended entirely or even mainly on the slave trade. Even the Aro, who were engaged in that trade to a greater extent than any other group, never depended on it alone for their livelihood. Not only did they trade in a wide variety of other goods, both local and regional, but they also depended on the takings from their activities as agents of the Long Juju, while those of them who lived in the settlements outside Aro Chukwu, especially in the Okigwe–Orlu–Awka axis, were also keenly involved in agriculture. And contrary to popular belief, not every consultation of the oracle required the supply of human chattels as payment. Payments were also made in domestic animals and other goods.⁴² However, subsequent events were to show that some of the slave traders went underground only temporarily instead of backing out completely.

This initial response must have beguiled the colonial authorities who, as already shown, on more than one occasion expressed a belief that the expeditions had achieved unqualified success in respect of the campaign against the slave trade and other barbarous practices. This was to turn out to be a mistake, for some of the men who had previously been involved soon crawled out of their holes and sought to re-establish the business in one form or another.

4

THE HINTERLAND PHASE II: COURTS AND CONSTABLES, 1900–1932

If the claim by the government of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria under Sir Ralph Moor that the need to strike a supposedly final blow against the slave trade provided the excuse for the military conquest of the hinterland, the campaign against that evil was once again downgraded as soon as the conquest was achieved, or rather as soon as the government felt that it had got a firm foothold in what before 1902 had been to it largely *terra incognita*. It can be said that much as the campaign remained on the books, it took the form mainly of proceedings in the courts under the provisions of the Slave Dealing Proclamation of 1901 against those actually caught going against that law. Rarely was any proactive or pre-emptive step taken to hunt down slave traders, or even to understand what happened in that business, how it happened, when it happened, or through whom it happened, apart from the traditionally demonized Aro or Inokun. It has to be said that people were punished not so much for trading in slaves but for being found out, that is, for breaking what Nigerians call the “Eleventh Commandment,” which is said to enjoin: “Thou Shalt Not Allow Thyself To Be Found Out.” The result was that the campaign was for the most part haphazard and for many decades ineffective. In the end it can be argued that if the slave trade died eventually, it died, as has already been suggested, from the gradual erosion of the base of the traditional culture and economy by the *pax Britannica* through the working of its new economic, administrative, social, religious, and cultural systems.

On 7 July 1901, Moor had produced a disquisition on slavery in the protectorate that should have served his successors as a guide in the matter of prosecuting the campaign against the evil traffic. In that document he had, among other things, more or less correctly identified the methods by which slaves were traditionally recruited in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland. According to Moor,

The existing sources from which slaves are at present originally obtained in the territories are:- (a) Natives seized by organized slave raiding and sold in slave markets; (b) Natives accused of witchcraft or crime forced by local public opinion to proceed and consult the oracles of the Aro Long Juju hierarchy, many of whom are seized and sold by Juju priests as slaves; (c) Natives seized in inter-tribal and other wars between towns and rival parties of the same tribe; (d) Natives, mostly children sold by their parents, guardians, or the chiefs of the tribe, in trade transactions to liquidate debts or obtain trade goods; (e) Native children born in a state of slavery. These children are generally regarded as free in the tribe or house in which they are born but are liable to be sold or pawned.¹

Moor may not have been correct in every detail. For instance, it was not only people accused of witchcraft that consulted oracles. There was a wide range of personal psychic and natural problems for which people consulted an oracle and toward the solution of which they could be asked to bring to the oracle human beings who were then seized and sold as slaves. Similarly, some of the children sold by their parents or guardians were sold not just because the parents were in need of money or trade goods but because they had committed abominations which made it mandatory that the town or clan should be rid of them, and because of other reasons.² Yet the document and the analysis contained in it suggested future lines of action on the part of anyone seriously concerned with the liquidation of the slave trade as a major project. For instance, more information should have been gathered along systematic lines on the slave markets of the hinterland of the Bight as well as on all the reasons why people consulted the man-eating oracles and the reasons why people sold their children and the various means of doing so. Similarly, Moor had claimed that the conquest of the interior and the general spread of civilization that was bound to follow would effectively take care of slave recruitment by means of war, kidnapping, and the consultation of oracles. He was also sure that the operation of the same forces would close down slave markets. Again, these claims called for specific action designed to ascertain whether the anticipated results were being attained as naturally as had been projected. The real difficulty in the abolition of the slave trade and slavery, said Moor, lay in (d) and (e), that is, in parents selling their children and in insuring children born in slavery against the danger of being picked up any time it pleased the house owner or house-head and sold. It was partly as a solution to the problem posed by the practice of parents selling their children that Moor issued the Master and Servant Proclamation, so that needy hinterland parents could apprentice their children to delta middlemen, and instead of paying for the children to be trained in modern business, the parents would be paid. As already mentioned, this proclamation was designed to meet two sets of needs—the needs of penurious hinterland families and those of population-starved coastal middleman states. To meet the threat of being sold at any time which hung over the heads of those born in slavery, he had issued the Native House Rule

Proclamation which made every house member a freeborn person and thus immune from resale.³ These two measures also called for sustained monitoring, not only because it was necessary to see if and how they were working, but also because Moor had specifically pointed out that the two issues they sought to address held the key to success in the campaign. But as already pointed out, none of these follow-up actions was taken.

Instead, for two decades or more after the main expedition into the interior, the focus of government attention was mainly on the Aro, or rather on two surviving institutions which were associated with the unrestricted trade—the Agbagwu regional market or fair, and the Ibini Ukpabi or Long Juju. The Agbagwu regional fair was one of the most important economic institutions thrown up in the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra by the participation of the peoples of that region in the old Atlantic system, marked as it was by the inhuman traffic in human beings. According to tradition, it would appear to have originated around Bende, which, with the British conquest during the Aro Expedition, became a district headquarters. In the course of the nineteenth century, some scholars say toward the end of that century, the Agbagwu had begun to rotate between Bende and Uzuakoli, located somewhat to the northwest. It has also been suggested that it was the Aro, the controllers of the fair, who made it rotate between the two towns as the noose of the infant colonial administration began tightening around them and their town of Aro Chukwu.⁴ Owing to faulty intelligence, it would appear, Uzuakoli had not been brought within the area that the Aro Expedition was asked to deal with. In consequence, on the morrow of their conquest and of Bende's becoming a government station, the Aro and their clients quietly and completely moved the Agbagwu out of Bende, thus making Uzuakoli the sole center for the fair. This was contrary to what the government had expected or hoped for. It had been thought that the defeat of the Aro and the capture of Bende would make it possible for Bende to become the largest single center east of the Niger for the distribution of imported goods, with the Aro playing the part of principal distributors. This much is clear from an undated report on Bende conveying information on the appointment of R. K. Granville as the first district commissioner and a Mr. Binny as his assistant. "Bende," says the report,

shared at one time with Ozu-Akoli, about 7 miles N.W. the honour of being the largest slave market in the Protectorate. Large settlements of the Ndoti, Isimpu, and Aro-Oru tribes were here and the Bende people simply thrived on the fact of their town being chosen as the spot for this traffic. The slave trade by law is now a thing of the past and it is most important to induce the Aros, Abiribas and Nkwerri people to return to the market, which should now be a large produce market. The Bende people themselves are now most willing to please. Every encouragement should be given to the Aros to trade, now that they had fallen into line with Government. The great idea is to make the Aro interest himself in the produce trade, in which by his intelligence he will remain the middleman of the interior in trading and buying oil instead of as hitherto slaves. In the process of this trade he will be displaying goods

to the natives, which hitherto they have not seen, and therefore have not had their desire whetted sufficiently to develop the riches in palm oil and kernels that lie at his door. The desire to possess will then show the necessity of work, which I trust will be followed by a corresponding large increase in trade.⁵

The movement of the Agbagwu to Uzuakoli and thus the shutting down of Bende as a regional market meant putting a spanner in the works for the Protectorate Government in respect of its principal policy of using the Aro and their wide-ranging trading network to promote legitimate trade and also in respect of its secondary policy of stifling the slave trade. For as long as Uzuakoli was beyond the immediate reach of the government, the Agbagwu was bound to concentrate on the slave trade and thus exact an irresistible pull on the Aro and all other slave traders. So what was to be done? To this question the provincial commissioner provided the answer in the following words:

the fact that there is a slave market there [at Uzuakoli] must [not?] be ignored but every opportunity should be taken to obtain information as will lead to the capture of any Aros, Abiribas or other natives found in possession of slaves bought at Osuakoli since April 1902. It will serve no good object driving the market away from Osuakoli, while it is there a certain amount of control can be kept, and [it] will enable the District Commissioner perhaps to make such an example of any offender caught, that the demand for slaves at Osuakoli will cease any way from our sphere of influence on account of the danger attaching to the people who insist on buying slaves.⁶

Should the Aro living under the control of the government ignore the instruction given them to reactivate the Bende market, then the government would stop them from going to Uzuakoli.

In further pursuit of the policy that favored returning the Agbagwu regional market or fair to Bende, the acting divisional commissioner, Richard Morrissey, held a meeting with leading Aro traders from the Aro villages of Ndoti and Isimpu on 31 March 1902 and spoke to them “very strongly . . . about the market at Oza-Akoli.” He told them the government was aware they were patronizing the Uzuakoli market in order to continue dealing in slaves, contrary to the law. “They must stop it,” he went on, because

when the Aro-Oru, the Elugu and the Ohaza [Ohaozara?] find that the Ndoti and Isimpu etc did not go to Oza-Akoli they would come to Bende if they wished to obtain goods such as cloth and tobacco. They knew very well there would be no interference with legitimate trade at Bende. I warned them that if they continued avoiding Bende and keeping people away the Government would probably consider the possibility of stopping their own people going to Oza-Akoli. It was, they knew, a slave market, produce and chop could be got more easily at Bende as anywhere else if people were allowed to come.

He ended by reminding them that the punishment for slave trading was seven years imprisonment with hard labor.⁷

But, of course, the government was making a mistake in thinking that the Aro had such control over the Uzuakoli fair and that they could be made to move it back to Bende where the government would be in a position to sanitize it and ensure no slave trading took place there. Uzuakoli leaders had themselves also been invited to a meeting with the acting divisional commissioner at which the latter had warned them and the representatives of other towns against continuing to trade in slaves under the new dispensation. But then, reported the district commissioner for Bende, Mr. Granville, not quite fourteen days after the meeting, slave trading resumed at Uzuakoli and kept on increasing from one session of the market to the other. According to his informant, the traders had adopted new methods designed to beat the government surveillance. According to Granville,

Comparatively few slaves are actually exposed in the market for sale, in fact on the last visit my spy made he only saw 10, seven of whom were heavily chained, but a system of selling in the houses has been introduced. Buyers also when transporting their slaves to their various destinations clothe them better than formerly to make them uniform with the rest of the party and therefore less conspicuous when passing a Government post.⁸

At this point the government came to the conclusion that it was impossible to get the Aro to reactivate the Bende regional fair at the expense of the one at Uzuakoli, nor was it possible to get the Uzuakoli to stop slave trading in their Agbagwu. It was also impossible to make either the home Aro or those in diaspora boycott the Uzuakoli market. The government considered marching troops to the market to arrest and prosecute all those engaged in the illegal business, but ruled out the idea on the ground that the culprits would escape before the arrival of the troops since the movement of such a force could not easily be concealed. The Aro would know about it and the towns through which the troops would have to pass would send advance warnings to Uzuakoli and its associates. To destroy the market would only cause it to be transferred to a more remote part of the protectorate, that is, beyond the point at which it could even be monitored using spies. Therefore the only option open to it, the government concluded, was to destroy the town, because “further parleying with these people will have little result for good, for it will be seen that only sixteen days elapsed between dates of your personal warning to them and their recommending slave dealing in their town.”⁹

This recommendation was made to the governor in June 1902 but no action could be taken for another six months or so. Meanwhile, slave trading went on merrily at the market as in the days of yore. A visit by a government spy in July revealed that slaves were still being sold in the open market, in addition to those sold secretly in private houses on the eve of the holding of the fair, during the fair, and after it. “This slave dealing question,” wrote Morrisey, the acting divisional commissioner, “presents many difficulties and will, I fancy,

for some time to come. The newly acquired districts are of course of considerable extent and white officers are few and far between, also the difficulty is increased by the fact that the news of a white officer's intended visit nearly always reaches a town before hand."¹⁰ But the opportunity to hammer the slave dealers of Uzuakoli eventually came in December of the same year, after the successful conclusion of a military expedition against the Ibeku and Olokoro people of Umuahia. The commanding officer of the expedition, Major Heneker, reported that

Lieutenant Morrisey, now that the work of the expedition was over, asked me if I did not think that the time was propitious to visit Ozu-Akoli and give a final blow to the slave trade and I cordially agreed with him. Our prestige was very high just then in the surrounding country and all wrong doers were trembling in their shoes and fearing a visit. The chiefs and real natives of the town had sent into Bendi assuring the District Commissioner that they had no hand in the war and were harbouring no refugees.¹¹

He continued in the same triumphant tone: "There appeared the chance of . . . ridding the country of several of the principals in this black traffic. Word was accordingly sent to say that we were coming to visit the town and that all who wanted peace were to receive us on our arrival, portions of the town not prepared to meet us would be treated as the Ibeku and Olokoro countries had been," that is, consigned to the flames.¹² In the event the expedition was a kind of promenade. After leaving Umuahia on 14 December, the columns passed through the towns of Ohuhu (Osa, Umuoriehi, Amafor, Umuire, and Okaiuga). In all these places they were received by gaily dressed crowds with presents of provisions. On getting to Uzuakoli, the columns were met by the chiefs and their people as well as by "600 women [who] danced round the camp for 3 hours as a sign of joy, they said, at our coming." The next day there was a meeting, which the commanding officer said was attended by some 3,000 people, some of them "stranger" elements. "Lieutenant Morrisey told them we had come to stop the slave trade which was destroying the country and called on the chiefs who were present to point out the people who were carrying it on. Mild and persuasive measures failed and it was only after threats that the town would be destroyed and the chiefs taken away . . . that they handed the culprits over" In all, fifty-one men were taken prisoner, some of them along with slaves they had just acquired but not had time to sell. "The next day," reported Heneker, "all parts of the town were visited under escort of all the chiefs who took us every where. Another meeting was held which was satisfactory. There will be no more trouble with Ozu-Akoli."¹³

Major Heneker was certainly too sanguine, just as Colonel Montanaro had been after blowing up the ravine from which Ibini Ukpabi spoke. As the present writer has observed elsewhere, for Uzuakoli "the threatened blow had come and passed. Uzuakoli was not destroyed. The Agbagwu market was not

moved to Bende, the Aro had not been prevented from visiting the Uzuakoli market and no measure had been concerted to destroy the little that remained of the market for slaves in the Oil Rivers States.”¹⁴ The administration was later to find out that slave trading remained for a long time an important aspect of the transactions that went on at the Agbagwu market in Uzuakoli. In 1912, for instance, Mr. Chamley, political officer at Aro Chukwu, was still pointing out that slaves had continued to be brought to the Uzuakoli market from all over the Eastern Province for sale. On this, his superior, Horace Bedwell, the provincial commissioner, wrote that

The connection between this juju [the Ibini Ukpabi] and Uzuakoli market in Bende District is well-known and was established many years ago. This market is the largest and most important in the whole of the Province. Every attempt so far to detect this illicit sale of people in the market has failed. I had purposely waited to take definite action in respect of this market until such time as enquiries have led as they have now to a successful result. The removal of the market would merely have the effect of at once locking up a very large trade and removing the illicit portion to some other place. I hope to be able now to take steps to try and purify the market in this respect. The whole people are for the moment afraid of being suspected of any connection with the juju and now is the time to take this matter up.¹⁵

If any action followed Bedwell’s threat, there is no evidence of it yet available. But when I raised this whole point with Uzuakoli elders in the early 1960s, they chuckled to themselves rather triumphantly and asked whether slaves were not being sold at Agbagwu during the Second World War, after which they went into the details of the tricks and stratagems of the business in its later days. For more on the incorrigible and undaunted slave dealers of Uzuakoli and their Agbagwu market, the reader is referred to *Justice in the Jungle*, written in 1932 by Frank Hives, a one-time political officer at Aro Chukwu, and to *Juju and Justice in Nigeria*, which the same author wrote in 1930 with a Mr. G. Lumley, who had also served as a political officer in Nigeria. Their accounts may be highly colored, but there is basic truth in the story they tell about the slave trade in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland at this time, about the Aro and their methods of carrying on this trade, and about the methods adopted by the colonial government to deal with the evil trade.¹⁶

The fact is that the encounter with the Agbagwu market turned out to be a larger-scale encounter than the colonial authorities recognized at the outset. First, Uzuakoli enjoyed a locational advantage, which it took the authorities time to overcome. It was surrounded by marshlands, which made it difficult of access, and on one side it was protected by hills. As A. J. Fox has pointed out, even though the Eastern Railway from Port Harcourt to Enugu reached Uzuakoli about 1914–15, the area was not fully opened up until about 1930 when a road was driven across the swamps from Umuahia toward Ohafia. The people of Uzuakoli themselves had such a vital interest in the survival of the

market that they were prepared to risk the verbal, political, and military weapons of the colonial government. Not only did they participate fully in all aspects of the business that went on at Agbagwu, but they made extra gains from the whole setup by providing warehousing facilities for all types of traders and from acting as go-betweens, putting the parties to the slave dealing business in touch one with the other. For this latter role they received a commission from both parties.¹⁷

The part they played in providing warehousing and hostel facilities during the period of the fair and the profit they made from so doing is best appreciated when the structure, duration, and scale of the fair is apprehended. On this we cannot do better than quote *in extenso* Mr. A. J. Fox's masterly reconstruction of this fair. According to Fox:

Unlike other markets, Agbagwu lasted for four days. Those who attended the market usually arrived on Afor towards the evening and went to a local market which was held at Ngwu [an Uzuakoli village] to buy their food; they also sold some of their goods there. On the following day, Nkwo, the real Agbagwu market was held at Ekeoba, and the next day it was continued at Eke Ukwu or Eke Ogbiti. The last day of the Igbo week, Orie was used by the traders for clearing up; they also went around all the villages trying to sell any of their goods which remained.

After this four day session of the Agbagwu market, the traders went home. Those who had not sold all their goods could leave the remainder in the house of the man with whom they had stayed. Twenty-four days elapsed between the market held at Ngwu and the next Agbagwu day; but eight days after Agbagwu had been held another market known as Bianco would take place. . . . After Bianco, sixteen days passed before Agbagwu came round again.¹⁸

In all his research and writing on this subject and matters related to it, the present writer has never come across any mention of Bianco in the official records, a fact that would suggest that the British authorities never came to a full appreciation of the nature and extent of what they were up against in their encounter with the Agbagwu regional fair. Its scope, territorially and economically, was also enormous. As Fox relates,

Agbagwu market was famous over a very large area; its popularity and great trade attracted people from far and near. Aro traders were always paramount, but traders from Akaka Elugwu, Elugwu Ngwo, Agbaja, Ngbogho, Nnewi, Okaiuga, Obowo, Ibeku, Ukwa, Ndi Okpara, Bende, Ohafia, Ozuitem and even as far as Ibibio and Onitsha came to it.¹⁹

Goods sold at the market included slaves brought in from Nkwerre, Ndi Izuogu, and Uburu, pigs from Uburu, the famous Akwete cloth from Ndoki on the southern borders of Igboland, ivory anklets and fish from the coast, native tobacco from Onitsha, cloth from Uburu and Abakaliki, tools and implements from the metal workers on the Nsukka-Okigwe cuesta, an assortment of foods

from all the areas around, and so on. Indeed, the issue of the Agbagwu regional fair was much larger than the issue of the slave trade and this would help to explain why the encounter with the market was for the colonial authorities such a difficult one.²⁰

After this account of the government's encounter with Uzuakoli and the Agbagwu regional fair, we now come to their equally long-drawn-out direct encounter with the Aro following the 1901–2 Expedition. Here the British were ambivalent in their attitude. In the first place they recognized that they needed the Aro in order to achieve their main objective of bringing about the unchallenged triumph of legitimate trade in the interior, just as they had needed and made use of the experience and wide-ranging contacts and connections of the delta or coastal traders. They recognized, for instance, that if the Aro took up the newly introduced British currency, which, as we have shown, was seen as an anti-slave trade measure, then its rapid spread was assured. Even as early as 1898, the British had talked to the Aro as the best hope for this measure, and the Aro had assured Gallwey that "as soon as the waterside people use the money it would soon be taken up by the interior tribes."²¹ Since the Aro dealt directly with the waterside people, their answer meant that if the Efik and the Ijo accepted the new currency, they, the Aro, would also accept it and that would guarantee its acceptance by their numerous customers in the interior.

We have also seen how the British sought to use the Aro to re-establish the Agbagwu fair at Bende where the British would be able to monitor and control it from the newly established Bende divisional headquarters and thus use it as the fulcrum with which to control the spread of British goods to all the nooks and corners of the hinterland. Such was the concern of the colonial government to convert the Aro into their agents for promoting the growth of trade specifically and the spread of the *pax Britannica* generally, that even before the war of 1901–2 was brought to an end, Mr. A. A. Woodhouse, one of the political officers attached to one of the columns of the expedition, had begun issuing to the Aro some kind of "certificate" saying they were free to go about in pursuit of their trade. But this had soon miscarried because the Aro went far and wide waving these papers in the face of everybody, saying the white man had agreed they should go about their business as before, without let or hindrance. According to a report which Moor sent to the Colonial Office on this matter, the Aro were claiming that "they have been given permission by white men to trade and that they have been told that as long as they trade, provide chop and carriers, they will be left a free hand in the country."²² When communities in the Umuahia area reacted to this claim with surprise, bewilderment, and disbelief, Woodhouse's superiors had to come out against the papers and against Woodhouse, who was censured for impetuosity and lack of discretion.²³ With this policy, which sought to use the Aro in the same way that the coastal middlemen had been used in championing British interests, the government had hoped to ensnare the Aro into committing, in the

short run, veritable economic suicide through making them undermine the slave trade and the Long Juju perhaps without knowing it. But the Aro did not fall for the bait so easily. Perhaps this explains the adoption by the government of that other side of their policy, which was anchored in suspicion and hostility.

This other arm of the policy sought to clip the wings of the Aro or to undermine any claims they might have as the ruling authority in the hinterland through whom the British could be expected to reach the people. Thus for many years British propaganda in the interior was strongly and openly anti-Aro. Every opportunity the British had to address any group of people regarding the dawn of the new era was used to ensure “that the Aro did not continue acting as they did when they were the dominant power.”²⁴ This was achieved partly by making the local people realize and exercise their powers and prerogatives as hosts over all travelers or settlers in their midst, especially over the Aro, who were advised to understand that like all other travelers and traders they were only guests wherever they stopped for the night and not “members of a conquering race.” They were also to be made to realize that in those communities in which they had settlements they were only tenants-at-will. “The Aros like all other natives,” wrote the government, “can only reside permanently at a place if they acquire permission to do so from the native rulers of the place. There is according to native law no right to settle in a place, this can only be done by the permission of the town, such permission is invariably given to those who are ready to recognize the town as befriending them but is refused to any who will not give proof that they will be orderly law-abiding inhabitants.”²⁵ Consequently all political officers in the areas conquered by the Aro Field Force, and indeed later in all of the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra, were “asked to educate the native councils and courts under their control on these matters and to get them to pass bye-laws impressing on the Aro that ‘their rights as traders will be supported only’ on the condition they ‘remember that they are guests and as such must conform to the legitimate rules and requirements of towns through which they travel’ or in which they settle.”²⁶

But perhaps the more important aspect of the government’s direct engagement with the Aro over the slave trade issue after 1902 took the form of eternal vigilance against the revival of the Long Juju, which was seen as the most notorious agency through which victims of the slave trade in the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra were recruited. Reporting in 1912 on this vigilance, the provincial commissioner said: “During the last few years we have received vague reports from time to time that this very important [Long] Juju society has been revived and on every occasion there was little to go on. Action was taken but with little result at the time.”²⁷ There were many reasons or indeed incidents to justify maintaining such vigilance. True, Colonel Montanaro had claimed that by blowing up the ravine and the cave in which the oracle was consulted, he had destroyed and removed all traces of it. But then the Aro

had mounted counter propaganda, pointing out that naturally the oracle had prior knowledge of the plans of the British against it and had left the cave just before the troops converged on Aro Chukwu. What was more, just a few months after the withdrawal of the troops from Aro Chukwu, a request came to the government from a group claiming to be the female elders of Aro Chukwu requesting permission to revive the worship of the juju. They claimed it was part of their traditional religion which they could not do without. They went further to promise to run its affairs themselves in order to ensure that the worship did not infringe any of the regulations of their new master. Not surprisingly, the request was rejected.²⁸ Then in 1906, Chief Kanu Okoro, the clan head of the Aro who had gone into hiding as the troops attacked Aro Chukwu in 1902, came out of hiding, surrendered to the government and was allowed to go back to his people. Almost immediately after his return, he held a large meeting of his people at which he told them that “he had come back to Aro Chukwu and that he had got permission from the Government to restart the Long Juju, and that anybody wishing to hold the Long Juju had first of all to obtain his permission and to pay him money for it.”²⁹ However, some of his people who did not want any further trouble with the government insisted that before the oracle could be revived, they must get written permission to that effect from their new masters. Apparently this debate went on for three years before Chief Kanu Okoro caved in, for it was not until 1909 that the government received a petition from a group claiming to represent Aro Chukwu and asking for permission “to resume the worship of their ancestral GOD, Chukwu.” But this merely gave the provincial commissioner of the Eastern Province, in which Aro Chukwu was situated, the opportunity to warn the Aro elders in writing, as he had warned them orally at a meeting in 1907, that “he could under no circumstances recommend the re-establishment of the Long Juju in any shape or form, that he trusted no one would be foolish enough to start Long Juju in some secret place as it was sure to be discovered and trouble bound to ensue, and that he hoped the matter would not be brought up again.”³⁰

Perhaps the petitioners were foolish, or plainly defiant, or simply refused to listen, for in spite of this severe warning they proceeded almost immediately to revive the running of the oracle, and that in four different locations in Aro Chukwu itself. The result was that within three years or so, some members of the Christian community in Aro Chukwu, into whose confidence the political officer, Mr. Chamley, had warmed himself, revealed the secret to the government along with detailed information which led to the agents being caught red-handed in the practice of consulting the oracle. “On the whole,” wrote Mr. Chamley, “26 people were accused. Of these three—Chief Okoroafo Oji, Chief Chiori, and Chief Oji Nwosu—were sentenced to death for sacrificing one Aba at the Long Juju; Chief Kanu Okoro (the clan head) was sentenced to three years with hard labour and deportation, the others were sentenced to 6 months with hard labour.”³¹ In addition, twenty-two boys were recovered. An

analysis of the origin of the victims showed they came from “practically all the districts in the Eastern Province, north and west of Aro Chukwu” and that in age they ranged between three and nine years.³² This information not only tells us how easily and how far the fame of the revived oracle had grown in so short a time. It also indicates to us a new trend in the conduct of this business, which we are going to encounter more and more in the later sections of this study. Here we have in mind the concentration on children. Also, observed Mr. Chamley, “As these children have all been found in the last three months, it shows to what extent the slave trade is carried on.”³³

In reporting on this episode of the second dismantling of the Long Juju, Mr. Chamley claimed that the oracle “is now destroyed,”³⁴ just as Montanaro had done in 1902. But the provincial commissioner, Bedwell, disagreed with him. “I do not think,” he said, “that a practice as old as this can be eradicated in what historically speaking is a few minutes. . . . Until the belief people have in this juju is out-grown we shall always be presented with the possibilities if its revival and be confronted with the difficult task of reducing the slave dealing coincident with it.”³⁵ Subsequent events were to show that Bedwell was right in his skepticism and Chamley wrong in his optimism. On 9 December the following year, the district commissioner at Aro Chukwu reported that

It has come to my ears several times during the last few months that the invocation of the Long Juju has been started in the Okigwi District. The rumour reached here through Aros who have been trading in Okigwi.

Yesterday one of the Principal Chiefs brought his brother to see me. This man has just returned from Okigwi and assures me that it is a fact that the Long Juju is now being made and worshipped at the Okigwi District at a place called Isiagu. This confirms a story told by one of my court messengers who informed me that when returning from Udi through Okigwi District some time ago, he rested at Isiagu and while there heard a great deal of gun firing going on. He says he inquired of some people there why they were firing guns and he was informed it was people who were making Long Juju who were firing guns on their return from the bush where Chukwu had been invoked.

Another of my chiefs informed me some days ago that his people who returned from Okigwi informed him that some Aros at another place called Eziana compound were also making Long Juju.

I think there is a great likelihood of what I have been told being true. A great number of Aros have left this district during the last couple of years and the major part of these have gone to reside in the Okigwi District.³⁶

Furthermore, in 1915 the same Christian group that had leaked to the government the fact that the oracle had been revived in Aro Chukwu came up with stories of an attempt to reactivate the Long Juju a second time in Aro Chukwu.³⁷ This was during the First World War when the colonial establishment, which had never been up to strength, was further depleted as a result of the fact that officers who had any form of military training re-enlisted in the

defense of their country and its sprawling world empire. After this date we hear next to nothing about the oracle and its activities, even though evidence from oral sources suggests that it remained active in one form or another until the 1940s. It is also known that up to the 1940s there were many wandering native doctors and oracle agents offering their expertise to different villages in the matter of “opening the eyes and mouths” of local deities to make them “see and talk,” that is, to upgrade them to oracles that would fetch the host communities money in the usual way of oracles.³⁸ And it is not unlikely that some of the slaves which Uzuakoli elders boasted were still being sold at Agbagwu during the Second World War were recruited through the Aro Long Juju, or indeed Long Jujus, since by the second decade of the twentieth century it would appear the Aro in different parts of the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra had started experimenting with the setting up and running of the oracle wherever they found themselves.

The fact that the political staff establishment of the colonial government in Nigeria was severely depleted and stretched by the First World War certainly helps to explain why after about 1915 or so we encounter in the records fewer complaints by the government against the Aro and their oracle in the matter of slave dealing in southeastern Nigeria and thus fewer steps taken specifically in pursuit of the abolition of the Long Juju. Under the mounting pressure of other work, the administration was compelled to step down its vigilance against the Aro and their Long Juju. Also this was the period of Frederick Lugard and amalgamation in Nigeria (1912–19), when Lugard brought heavy pressure on the administration of the Southern Provinces in the bid to make the system there conform to what he had established in the Northern Provinces in the period 1900–1906. Not only did this result in a great deal more work for the staff in the southeastern provinces, but it caused a great deal of disorganization and discouragement, especially as it created the impression that everything that had been done there by Lugard’s predecessors was wrong. This included the aggressive posture against the Aro and the slave trade.³⁹ Perhaps another possible explanation for the lack of activity is that as the *pax Britannica* spread and took deeper root, the conditions that in the past had helped to promote the slave trade shrank from year to year, thereby causing many slave dealers, including many Aro, to abandon the evil trade. But perhaps this was true only up to a point, as subsequent events were to show. Much more importantly, it was almost immediately after the First World War that Sir Richmond Palmer, the powerful lieutenant-governor of the Northern Provinces, began accusing the administration of the Southern Provinces of responsibility for the so-called crime and troublemaking of the Aro. The Aro, he insisted, were a ruling race like the Jukun of the middle Benue, the Igala, and the Sefawa of Borno. Through misguided prompting by the missionary bodies, Palmer contended, the administration of the Southern Provinces had adopted a hostile policy toward the Aro, who in reaction turned to crime and rapine. If the government wanted peace and orderly development in the

southeast, he advised, they should reverse this policy, rebuild the authority of the Aro, and use it in the same manner that the authority of ruling races in the Northern Provinces was being harnessed to serve British interest. Even though the Southern administration denied these charges, describing them as unfounded, it is significant that not long afterward an anthropologist with a Northern Nigerian administrative background was deployed to study the Aro with a view to seeing if and how their influence could be used to run the southeastern provinces.⁴⁰ In this changed climate, the earlier preoccupation with the Aro as troublemakers and slave traders waned somewhat, though not completely. This was unfortunate as subsequent events were to reveal.

Indeed, from about 1923 onward the attention of the government came to be focused on the Nkwuruoto regional market at Uburu in the Afikpo Division of Ogoja Province, thanks to the acting divisional officer of Awgu Division in Onitsha Province. Writing to his Resident at Onitsha on the running sore of the slave trade in the Eastern Provinces, he had said:

As you well know Aros, Natives of Awka Division and of Mbowo [Mgbowo] in this Division are nearly always the criminals and the place where the slave changes hands is invariably Uburu market. . . . Once the child or slave reaches Uburu all trace is at once lost and so, although the stealer and the Aro, first buyer, may be arrested and punished; the farther dealer and particularly the final holder, never get punished, and so the trade goes on obeying the economical law of supply and demand, there being nothing done by Government to lessen the latter.⁴¹

He suggested that his superior might consider communicating with his counterpart, the Resident of Ogoja Province, so that the latter might take steps to obtain the information needed by the government in order to know how the trade was carried on, with a view to putting as many obstacles as possible in the way of its successful prosecution. The matter called for urgent and serious attention, he said, because in spite of all the effort being made by the government to eliminate the evil, police reports showed that the trade was on the increase.⁴²

When the matter was taken up as suggested by Mr. Cook, it was discovered that Uburu had more or less taken over the position formerly occupied by the Agbagwu market of Uzuakoli as the major centre for assembling, selling, and distributing slaves in the region, with supplies coming in from the Northern Provinces, from the Cameroons, and from the Onitsha Province. According to Mr. G. B. S. Chapman, political officer,

The main traffic in children begins in the fringe of the Northern Provinces in the Idoma Division and the collecting centre is the Aro populations in Northern Abakaliki—the Nkerlago, Ishielu and Effium areas. The Aro have little difficulty in buying children from Idoma where a father with many children will be quite prepared to sell one. From the halt in Ishielu in Abakaliki Division there are two lines of traffic. The first diverges to Nkerefi (Agbani) and does not touch this Division.

The destination of this group is Port Harcourt, the Niger and Bonny creeks. The second one is to Onicha which is a main halt. The Aro population in Onicha is warned by Nkerlago of the arrival of stolen children. The children arrive at night where they are safely escorted by Aro accomplices. These accomplices are the bad men of whom Onicha frequently complains. . . . A message is then sent to Aro Uburu. On the next market day Aro Uburu has arranged for the middlemen from Obubra and Cross River banks to attend. On market day the children are transferred, the negotiation taking place at night.⁴³

Thus, said Chapman, the big Uburu market was used mainly to disarm suspicion and this was often so successfully done that the children were dispersed to Obubra and the Cross River region south of Obubra using the main roads. There was a third line of traffic from Idoma, which skirted the eastern side of Abakaliki Division. The main halt on this route was Aba Omege, from where the route plunged into Obubra. According to Chapman's informant, the Onicha–Uburu route handled between fifteen and a hundred transfers each market day depending on the time of year, with the rainy season seeing the lowest numbers (ten to fifteen victims) on a market day, and the dry season seeing the highest (a hundred victims) during the high trading season.⁴⁴

Another report, summarized by Chapman, gave details of the traffic from the Cameroons, showing that it was only part of a larger traffic involving an odd assortment of legitimate trade goods. Here there were two kinds of dealers:

There are those who bring down juvenile slaves from the Cameroons as a speculation, and there are those who import them from Uburu market on a definite request from an up-country buyer. . . . It is not to be thought that slaves are the sole commodity brought down from the Cameroons. The main demand of the Bale is primarily for powder and salt, with a modicum of other trade goods such as comparatively expensive shawls and cloth for his womenfolk. To purchase these he brings tobacco, kernels, potatos [*sic*], and cash, but a small boy or a marriageable girl will be found in his train perhaps two or three times out of ten. The main powder market for him is Ikom, seconded by Etomi.⁴⁵

At Uburu it was clear the government was facing problems no less complicated than those they faced at Uzuakoli. In some respects the situation at Uburu was much worse, especially in the area of communication, as access for half of the year—during the rains—was almost impossible not only due to a lack of access roads, but more seriously due to the nature of the soil, which is usually clayey and waterlogged. Also the Nkwuroto market was a regional market of long standing with an extensive catchment area stretching far in all directions. The region was heavily infiltrated by the Aro, the professional dealers in slaves. Their settlements were scattered all over the area. "At present," wrote Mr. L. H. Shelton, the district officer for Afikpo, in 1926,

Uburu is an ideal place for the slave traffic with its large market and its almost assured immunity from the incursion of the class of person likely to turn informer. The [Presbyterian] Mission does excellent Medical work but little in the way of education, and nothing can be hoped for in the way of educational enlightenment. I have refrained, as a rule, from keeping Police stationed at Uburu, as, without supervision, they may do more harm than good.⁴⁶

Three integrated solutions were suggested but not even one could be implemented. One was increased police action, either by sending a good and reliable detective to “sit down in the place” long enough to collect such information as could be used with devastating effect against the traffickers, or by setting up a permanent police detachment *in situ*. But no good C.I.D. man was available for the work. “Investigation into slave-dealing,” insisted the superior police officers, “lends itself so easily to bribery and corruption that great care must be exercised in the choice of the men engaged in the work.” At one point it was thought that a detective sergeant at Calabar was the man for the job, but then he was bogged down in “the Aro country” with investigations into a case of bribery, which was also connected with slave dealing at Ubium. On the alternative proposal of stationing a police detachment at Uburu, the Resident wrote that

We are handicapped here by an inadequate police detachment (13) in relation to the population (137,000). On the map Afikpo looks small but the population is dense. Obubra (population 60,000 odd) has, I believe, a sergeant in charge with a corporal under him. Here we have a corporal in charge. . . . The District Officer is right, one must have a strong enough police detachment and be able to leave some of the work in competent hands. In the absence of either, I instructed the District Officer Afikpo to leave Uburu market alone fearing to stir it up before I had the ways and means of breaking up the trade finally.⁴⁷

It does not appear that he ever acquired the ways and means he had in mind!

The second solution suggested was to improve access by road into Uburu from such neighboring towns as Afikpo, Awgu, and Enugu, all administrative centers. Such a development, it was hoped, would improve official vigilance and supervision as well as increase the flow into Uburu of people in the modern sector of the economy. It was further hoped that from among such people it should be possible to recruit agents and informers against slave traffickers. At the time, it was reported, “admirable roads already existed from Afikpo into Uburu and from Aba-Omege into Uburu, but both were useless on account of the absence of two large bridges, the construction of one of which—e.g., the Asu River (Afikpo-Uburu road) was under consideration and might be tackled by the Native Administration in 1929.” The political officer, Afikpo, requested £120 to put up a wooden bridge over one of the rivers, but was told by the Resident that there was no vote for such a project for the year. But for what it was worth, the Resident agreed to make the sum of forty

pounds available to him for the purpose. The correspondence broke off here and we are unable to say what became of this proposal.⁴⁸

The third suggested solution arose from the growing recognition that most of the child victims of this traffic were sold by their parents. "I am of the view," contended one of the officers,

that a surer way of putting an end to this terrible traffic than by seeking to intercept the dealers on occasions by the limited and untrustworthy means available is to render conditions for the parents such that they do not feel the necessity to sell their children to enrich themselves. This traffic is not the slavery of the raid, but is borne solely of the impecunious parent who sees in his child the ultimate source of temporary wealth. . . . By eliminating this desire, that is by raising his standard of life, and perhaps by introducing more finality into the decisions of the Native Courts in matters of debt, I believe that the selling of children would disappear.⁴⁹

This suggestion, excellent as it sounded, was sheer wishful thinking. British imperial administration in Nigeria was first and foremost an administrocracy that gave inadequate attention to the economic development of the colonials. In economic matters it merely sought to achieve the controlled exploitation of existing natural wealth. Furthermore, it was not just impecuniosity that impelled parents to dispose of their children. Up to that time and for a decade or more after the 1920s, indigenous society knew of no other satisfactory way of dealing with the problem of delinquent and scandalous children or of children born in abnormal circumstances, aside from selling such children into slavery. The officer's suggestion could not be pursued. In the event, the anti-slave trade campaign remained what it had always been for the most part—a matter for the courts and the constables.

The other major thrust of the campaign against the slave trade in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland was that undertaken under the Slave Dealing Proclamation No. 5 of 1901 whose provisions have already been discussed here. In amalgamated Nigeria, that enactment was abolished by Lugard in 1916 when, as part of his policy of bringing the administration of the South in line with what then existed in Northern Nigeria, he made what was chapter 11 of the Laws of Northern Nigeria applicable to the entire Protectorate under the name and title of the Slavery Ordinance (1916). There were two arguments for taking this step. One was Lugard's drive, as far as possible, for uniformity in Nigerian administrative policy and practice wherever he could, especially at the level of native administration. The other was that it was not clear, Lugard claimed, that the southern administration had ever made a law that formally proclaimed the status of slavery abolished throughout its territories, even though in practice its courts never recognized the legal status of slavery but assumed it to have been abolished.

The new ordinance, therefore, began by declaring in an unqualified manner the abolition of the legal status of slavery throughout the Protectorate of

Nigeria. After that it provided that “All persons heretofore or hereafter born in or brought within the Southern Provinces, and all persons born in or brought within the Northern Provinces after March 31st 1901 are hereby declared to be free persons.” It made illegal all contracts concerning slave dealing or pawning for debt and denied former slave owners compensation in respect of slaves who might want to assert and claim their freedom. Section 6 gave the governor-in-council broad powers with respect to the regulation of conditions guiding the adoption of children, or their custody or employment by persons other than their legal guardians. The governor-in-council was also empowered to make regulations touching on the observance of customs or practices that had restrictive implications for individual liberty.⁵⁰

Apart from this new legislation there was an effort in this period to tackle the problem of slave dealing in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland through the introduction of more legislation, designed to control marriage and betrothal among the people. This arose from the knowledge of officers with long working experience of the region that it was customary practice for underage girls, indeed female children, to be betrothed to either boys or men from the day of their birth. The practice, they discovered, created a situation that made it possible for the trade in young girls to flourish under the full view of the government, since culprits caught in the act had no difficulty in claiming that their helpless child victims were betrothed to them or indeed married to them already. As the parents of such girls were usually partners in the crime, it was usually very difficult to prove charges of child stealing and slave dealing in court in such cases. The suggestion on how to close this loophole that provided a convenient escape route for slave dealers originated in 1913 from Mr. Horace Bedwell, who was one of the longest serving officers in the Eastern Provinces at the time when the matter came up for discussion in 1916. Bedwell was at the time of writing in 1913 the provincial commissioner for the Eastern Province with his headquarters at Calabar. “From time to time,” he wrote,

attention has been drawn to the fact that there exists in the Eastern Provinces a specific form of slave dealing. This consists of selling small children at recognized centres and, if discovered, putting in a plea that such cases come under dowry or marriage. . . . To prove a case of slave dealing in the Supreme Court is a matter of great difficulty. This matter has formed the subject of correspondence before, some of which was published and it was not considered that any action was required beyond the investigation of statements made and the freeing of people forthwith from servitude leaving it to the people concerned to reclaim them and prove their title to them.⁵¹

After much thought on this matter, continued Bedwell, he went into “consultation with many officials and non-officials” and found that the general belief was that a very large portion of the slave trade in the Eastern Provinces would

vanish if means could be found to stop the trading in small girls, because “many cases that come to court fail owing to the difficulty of proving ‘mens rea’ and that the transaction was not one under native custom or dowry.” To achieve the objective he had in view, Bedwell suggested to Lugard the passing of a law “requiring the registration of betrothals and marriages before they can be recognized as such.” Under this system, a man who wished to be betrothed or married would have to go to the home district of the girl or woman and have the betrothal or marriage registered before the district officer, with the girl or woman and her parents or legal guardians signing prescribed forms which would be so designed as to cover all loopholes. Before putting forward the proposal, Bedwell said, he had consulted fully with his district commissioners, through whom he had also canvassed the native courts and their members, and all, he said, had received the scheme with enthusiasm. He had also submitted the proposal to His Honour Justice A. F. C. Weber at Calabar, and the justice had not only said he read it “with great interest” but that he was in agreement with the view “that some such system will greatly tend to reduce slave dealing which is still rampant in this Province.” Justice Weber had also gone on to make suggestions aimed at making the proposal more viable as a legislative measure. “In submitting this report for the information and consideration of His Excellency the Governor,” Bedwell concluded, “I would lay stress on the opinion I hold in common with many other officers in this Province of the necessity of taking action as soon as possible to strike a blow to a system at present obtaining which can only be condemned as abhorrent.”⁵²

The proposal was made in 1913, but it was not until 1916 that Lugard came to look at it. “This interesting paper,” he minuted, “has I regret to say been delayed a long time before it reached me, and a long time since. It represents a great deal of work and thought on the part of Mr. Bedwell and his conclusions demand careful consideration.” By the time Lugard was writing this minute, a great deal of water had gone under the bridge and the fatal rift, between Lugard and his favored officers with Northern Nigeria experience on the one side and the officers of the old Southern Nigeria administration on the other, had not only developed but deepened. The result was that Lugard and the officers with Northern Nigeria experience, with whom he surrounded himself at headquarters, shot the scheme to pieces. They were surprised to read that the chiefs and peoples who were canvassed had supported it and that the chiefs had given it out that girls would usually be asked for their consent in matters of marriage and betrothal. Lugard and his party did not see that the scheme could help fight the evil of slave dealing or that the signing of the registration certificate by an underaged girl and her parents could be taken as assuring that such a deal was not indeed a case of slave trading. Would the signature of such a young girl be worth anything in the courts, they asked? Would it be advisable in such circumstances to enforce the contents of the registration certificate? There was a danger, said Lugard, that in the eyes

of the people the registration certificate could come to be regarded as a certificate of ownership, in which case the whole process would end up promoting the slave trade instead of fighting it.⁵³

Even though Bedwell made it clear that his proposal was for the old Eastern Province, which existed up to 1913, Lugard said it was expected to apply to the Colony Province (i.e., Lagos) as well as to the Yoruba, the Bini, the Igbo, the Ibibio, and others, which was to him a strong argument against the proposed measure. Finally, he said, the proposal was not just about fighting the slave trade, but more seriously an attempt to introduce a legal form of betrothal and marriage with rules as to payment of dowry, divorce, and so on, and that on such an important subject he would want to have the views of one Mr. Carr, and of some commissioners of the Eastern group of Provinces with long experience, such as Dr. Maxwell, Mr. Roberts, and Mr. Hargrove. With this the document was supposed to be thrown back into the debating arena. Some kindly officer minuted below Lugard's devastating criticism that "In reading the papers it must be borne in mind that Mr. Bedwell was speaking of the old style Native Courts presided over by a District officer."⁵⁴ We have no evidence that the matter was taken up again at any stage. The prosecution of offenders caught in the act was largely a negative form of intervention in the battle against the slave trade. The proposal by Bedwell or something akin to it would have provided, on the other hand, the opportunity for proactive or positive intervention. But the opportunity was not taken.

The impact of legislative action and rumors of legislative action on the institution of slavery is not our concern in the present study, which is concerned only with the process that made a person a slave and the attempts made by the colonial authority to abolish it. With respect to this specific process, however, the evidence available indicates that, as the Igbo say, if the noise of the thunder entered the head of the average slave trader through one ear, it escaped promptly through the other, in consequence of which many of the traders continued to think it should be business as usual. We have already seen evidence of this attitude in the story of the Aro, the Uzuakoli, and their associated institutions such as the Ibini Ukpabi oracle and the Agbagwu regional market. We shall now provide a few examples which suggest that this attitude was fairly widespread, while also illustrating our point that the antislavery proclamation was by and large a passive approach to the abolition of the internal slave traffic. It did not aim to seek out offenders in order to punish them, nor did it throw up obstacles designed to forestall slave trading. It dealt only with those who were unlucky enough, through either inherent bad luck or stupid audaciousness, to stumble against it.

One of our chosen cases is from Okwoga Division, which, in 1914, was in Onitsha Province. It was a case in which two men, Ejemgbe and Okpe, from what later became Nsukka Division, were charged with seizing one Odo from Ukehe, also in Nsukka, with the intention of selling him into slavery. Odo and some others had been recruited as carriers for a white man whose loads they

had taken to Okwoga. On the return journey Odo was not able to keep up with his colleagues, who heedlessly left him behind. As he sat down to rest by the roadside, Ejemgbe and Okpe came out from the bush and tried to entice him with all kinds of offers to follow them. When he would not be enticed, they seized him and took him to their town. There they showed him as their prize to their chief, whom they promised a pig if he would look the other way while they sold their captive. But the chief, who apparently did not want to fall afoul of the government, refused, telling them that the government had abolished slave trading. He also took other steps, which brought the two abductors into the embrace of the law, which sentenced them to three months imprisonment each, with hard labor.⁵⁵ The interesting aspects of this case include the fact that the crime was committed on one of the new main roads, showing that these roads did not immediately confer immunity on their users because of any special fear or respect attaching to the white man and his government. Equally astounding was the fact that the victim was a man who was in the process of carrying out an assignment for the new rulers and should have been treated as taboo while on such an assignment, a fact suggesting that Ejemgbe and his companion Okpe were either stupid and ignorant or arrogant and audacious. Also worthy of note is the fact that the chief refused to cooperate because, he said, slave trading had been made illegal. This suggests that the propaganda of the government was hitting home and making an impression even in areas as remote as Okwoga was from the center of government.

Our second example is from the Okigwi Division of Owerri Province. This 1916 case involved two men, Iwuoha and Ofor. It was a case of kidnapping in classic style as the statement of one of the victims, Wekwe, clearly shows:

The two men came to our house and asked for water to drink. I gave it to them, and they asked me to show them Umuna market road. I told them I did not know the road and they started to draw us away. They put sand for our mouths. One carried each of us; they took us to the big road till they reached Okwe. There people saw us and they drew us into the bush. When they took us for bush they held us for neck, and when people call us they stopped us from answering. They tell us if we answer and people come for bush they would kill us. When my people called and I answered they slap me.

Luckily for the victims, the kidnapping had been discovered quickly, as a result of which a chase after the criminals had ensued. The children had been kidnapped at about 8 a.m. but were not recovered until the evening, by which time they had been carried some six miles away from home and were very close to Afor Umuna, another regional market that was noted for the sale of slaves even as late as the early 1940s. An interesting aspect of this case was the request for drinking water by the criminals, which was followed by a request for directions to the Umuna market. This was a standard dodge of kidnapers

designed to establish if any adults were within earshot. If there were, such an adult would in all likelihood have asked the children whom they were talking with. Such a development would have alerted the criminals that there was danger, and they would have scurried away. Iwuoha and Ofor were convicted and each sentenced to five years imprisonment with hard labor.⁵⁶

The third example took place in 1916, in Port Harcourt, which at the time was one of the rising urban centers. The culprits were two men, Ebube Dike and Achonye. The case is of interest because it tells us something of the mentality and cynicism of slave dealers in this period. The child they took to sell belonged to one of their colleagues in the Nigerian Railway and had more or less been left in their care. Said Iheonu, the mother of the child:

I am a native of Inbala [?] under Arochukwu and have been living at Port Harcourt for about a year having come down with my husband Madu Wike [Maduwike?] who is working on the Railway as a labourer. I know the two accused well as they work with my husband and we all live in the same quarter. The child Mbeke is about three years old and my daughter. About three months ago the two accused came to my house and we had conversation, the while Ebube Dike was playing with the child. After some time I went out to go to the market and left the two accused in my house which had often happened before. I was absent about three hours and on my return I missed the child. The two accused had also gone. When I spread the news an Owerri man named Njoku came and said he had seen that morning the first accused, Ebube Dike, carrying the child and the second accused with him. Njoku stated he saw the two place the child in a canoe and pull away towards Okrika. Njoku also said that he asked Ebube Dike where he was taking the child and Ebube Dike replied "To the Mother." I then reported to the police and the two accused were arrested at Okrika with the child in their possession.⁵⁷

Abibisikoma, the contact man for Ebube Dike at Okrika, gave the following evidence:

About three months ago the two accused came to my house at Okrika bringing a small child with them. . . . The first accused said to me "we have brought you this small child to take and sell for us at Nembe, Brass." I replied "let it stand over until tomorrow." The next day they came to me in panic and said the kidnapping had been discovered and asked me to hide the child where she could not be traced. I refused and detained them in my place until I could find the parents. The first accused then threatened suicide and in the confusion the second accused escaped. Later in the evening two constables arrived and I handed over the child and the first accused to them.

The culprits were found guilty and sentenced to imprisonment accordingly.⁵⁸

Our fourth example took place in Okigwi in 1932 and involved Diribeofor Mgbeke (known in the records as Duruibe Ofor) and three other men—Jack Ngwu, Okoronkwor, and Wokocho.⁵⁹ Briefly put, Diribeofor "enticed a child known as Udorie from the Police Barracks at Okigwi on 26th May 1932, to his

house and after telling his household falsely that he had found her wandering, he conveyed her to the Cross River to dispose of her to the best advantage. The child escaped from the house of Ude Okafor with whom she had been left at Osimatom, and succeeded in attracting the attention of a passing police Constable who rescued her.” But we are going beyond this brief summary to quote the evidence given in court by the prosecution witnesses and the accused, as they give us the most illuminating impressions yet of the circumstances surrounding the period and the subject of this study. Sergeant Thomas Anozie, the first witness for the prosecution, stated:

I was in charge of the Police Detachment at Okigwi until September 7th last. On eleventh May 1932 a child named Udorie was brought to Police Barracks at Okigwi—she remained in my care on behalf of her mother Elosi. She had been found wandering and I had sent for her mother, Elosi to come and take charge of her again. On May sixteenth last the child Udorie was missing from the barracks. Her age was about seven years. I was unable to trace her. On ninth July last the same child was brought to the Okigwi Police Barracks by Police Constable Joseph Okafor who is stationed at Obubra.

The victim, Udorie, who was the second witness for the prosecution, gave the following statement:

My name is Udorie. I live at Nnaka [Nanka?] in Awka. My mother is one Elosi. My father is dead. About four months ago I was living in the Police Barracks at Okigwi and was being looked after by the Police Sergeant (first witness for the prosecution). I was under a mango tree eating a mango one day in the morning when Duruibe Ofor (first accused) told me to go with him to fetch tobacco for a police man. I went with him to his house at Ihube. There he put me in the house of his wife Ukaeje [Ukaeju] and that night she gave me food. After supper, first accused went out and returned with one Irechuku—First accused told Irechuku that he had found me in the market. I asked for the tobacco, but first accused said he would give it to me later and then take me back to Okigwi. In the evening I was taken to first accused’s mother whose name I do not know and given ado yam—When we were going a girl gave me some oil bean fruit. Then I was taken back by Duruibe Ofo to Ukaeje’s house and food was prepared. Irechuku had a mat and a basket. I was put in the basket and my mouth was tied up with a cloth and I was fastened in the basket. First accused asked Irechuku to carry me but the latter refused and first accused carried me. It was raining and I was beaten by rain all night until I got to Jack Ngwu’s (second accused’s) house where I also saw Wokocha (fourth accused) who lives there. I was put in a room with first accused in second accused’s house and second accused prepared food and fourth accused brought it in—First accused induced me to eat because I was crying and said that if I did not stop crying he would not take me back to Okigwi. The third accused told fourth accused to bring three eggs and these they broke and mixed with mud and smeared the mixture over my body. When night came, I was again tied up in the basket and second accused carried me and took me to Mgbeke’s house at Oga. Mgbeke asked me where I came from and I told her and she told the

accused to take me away at once. There first accused and Irechuku went away and second and fourth accused took me to the house of third accused (Okoronkwo) at Ada. There fourth accused told me that he would call my people. He went and returned with a canoe which he and one Ude Okafor paddled. Second accused, third accused, fourth accused, Ude Okafor and I went in the canoe and went in it to Ude Okafor's house at Osimatom. There was a teacher in Ude Okafor's house and his wives. I do not know the name of the teacher, but his wives were named Enyidia and Okwe—Then second and fourth accused left but when I do not know but third accused stayed in Ude Okafor's house. I ran off from Ude Okafor's house some days later to Udum. The chief caught me. I forgot his name. Kanu was sent to call Ude Okafor and third accused—They came and took me back.—Third accused asked me what he should do so that I would not run again. I asked him to take me back to my mother. He then told me that my mother had asked that I should stay with him for three months. I knew this was not true. I was beaten and given no food when I tried to run away. I escaped in the end into the forest. When I saw a police man passing I ran after him and he took me away to his place. From there I was brought to the court member's house and there Ude Okafor asked for me to be returned to him, saying I was one of his household. The police man then took me and took Ude Okafor to the District Officer at Obubra. From Obubra I was taken to Okigwi.

The third witness for the prosecution, Irechuku, gave his own evidence, stating that

I am a farmer living at Ihube. I know first accused well. The second and fourth accused and I met once before. Third accused I do not know. First accused came to me and told me that he had found a girl for one Okpani to marry. I had previously been present when Okpani had told first accused that he wanted him to find a girl for him (Okpani) to marry. Okpani is an Aro living at Ada and Eluama. He is a cam wood trader. I asked first accused to wait until the next day but he said he was in a hurry. I then went to his house. I saw there Udorie (second witness for the prosecution). She was asleep. She was awoken and she ate with us. Nwaeke and Ukaeje were present. Then Udorie (second witness for prosecution) went to sleep and I suggested to first accused that as she was tired she should be taken to Okpani the next day. First accused brought a basket and a blanket and said he would not wait. I refused to carry the girl. First accused said that the parents of the girl had agreed to his taking her away. We reached Eluama and went to the house where second and fourth accused were sleeping. We went in—Second accused said that Okpani had gone home but that if the price was reasonable he himself would marry the girl. He brought out eight shillings for wine and he and the first accused agreed at fourteen pounds for the girl. Second accused asked about the parents of the girl and said he would not pay for the girl unless he saw her parents. We then went on to Ada. I led the way. First accused, second accused, fourth accused, myself and the girl went to Ada to another house of Okpani's. Okpani was not at home. We then returned I and first accused to Ihube to fetch as I thought the parents of Udorie. On the way I fell sick and asked when I saw first accused again, at a later date, if he had taken the girl's parents to Ada. First accused said that he had not done so and confessed to me he had stolen the child when he had met her on the road. I then told first accused

to return the girl but the next day the police came. Until first accused told me he had stolen the girl I fully believed that the child was brought with the permission of her parents as is our custom.

The fourth witness for the prosecution added his evidence:

My name is Ukaeje [Ukaeju]. I am the wife of the first accused by native custom. About four months ago first accused brought a girl named Udorie to me and told me that he had met the girl on the road and that the girl was crying and had asked him to take her to her town. He called Irechuku (third witness for the prosecution) to ask him, he said, if he knew where the girl came from. I looked after the girl and gave her food . . . [The child said] that she came from Nnanka near Onitsha. When Irechuku came first accused asked him if he knew where the child's town was. When Irechuku and first accused came out with the child I asked them to take her back to her town and they agreed that they were about to do so. When first accused returned I asked him if he had returned the child to her parents and he said he had. I thought first accused had been telling lies because the child cried very much when she was brought to our house and at one time first accused had told me that the child was the daughter of one of his relatives.

Nweke, the fifth witness for the prosecution, gave evidence as follows:

My name is Nweke. Head wife by custom to the first accused and I live at Ihube. About four months ago first accused brought a girl named Udorie to our house. First accused said that the girl had escaped from people who had stolen her to sell her and that she had asked him to take her back to her parents. First accused called Irechuku (third witness for prosecution) and he agreed to take the girl back to her people with first accused for the sake of a reward. They went (first accused and Irechuku) and returned and said they had handed the child to her relatives who had thanked them very much. Then the police came and then it was I discovered the first accused had stolen the child.

The sixth witness for the prosecution stated:

I am Ude Okafor. I am a trader living at Osimatom. Second accused and fourth accused used to come to my house at Osimatom to buy yams. One day about four months ago at about four p.m. fourth accused came to my house and asked me to lend him a canoe to fetch second accused. I went in my canoe at about six p.m. to fetch second accused—I found second accused on the far bank with a child called Udorie (second witness for the prosecution). I ferried them over. Meanwhile fourth accused had stayed in my house. Second accused asked me to look after the girl whose name was Udorie. I refused at first but in the end I agreed and second and fourth accused went away. The girl stayed with me for sixteen days but ran away. I found her and beat her. I had no idea that the child was stolen. I asked the child why she ran away and she told me she wanted to go back to her father and mother. She finally ran away from me and I was arrested when I was looking for her. I saw Udorie with a Police-man and when I went to him and claimed Udorie as being

a girl who had been left in my house, I was then arrested and taken before the District Officer.

The statement by the first accused reads as follows:

About 10 a.m. when I was returning from Uтуру, I heard a child calling. I stopped and saw Udorie. She asked me if I knew Abiriba-Nnaka and said that Ubaja [Ugbaja?] and Okeke were taking her to Uzuakoli to sell her when she ran away. She said that her father was dead but that her mother and brother were alive. I took her to my house. Irechukwu (third witness for the prosecution) said that I was fortunate when I told him about the occurrence and that he did not know the place Abiriba-Nnaka and suggested that as I had found the girl she was my property and I had better marry her to Okpani. We took the girl to Eluama where we met second and fourth accused—Okpani was not at home. We then took the girl to Ada [Edda] where Opani lives, Irechuku, second accused, fourth accused and I to marry her to Okpani. Okpani was not at home. Second accused told Irechuku and myself to look for the mother of the girl Udorie, while he went to look for Okpani—Fourth accused stayed with the girl. I went home and asked about Abiriba Nnaka but no one knew where it was. . . . Then Irechuku (third witness for prosecution) suggested that we should recover the girl but the police came before we could do so.

Jack Ngwu, second accused, stated as follows:

Four months ago, I was selling cam wood at Eluama with fourth accused. About four a.m. third witness for prosecution (Irechuku) and first accused came into the house with the child Udorie (second witness for prosecution). I told them that Okpani was not at home. They showed me Udorie and said that she was the girl Okpani was to marry. I said the girl was intended for me and told all to come with me to Ada [Edda]. First accused, when I asked, said that the girl's parents were not present but that her relatives had given her to him to give in marriage. First accused, and fourth accused and Irechuku (third witness for prosecution) and Udorie and I left for Ada [Edda]—Udorie walked. We found at Ada that Okpani was not at home. I told first accused and Irechuku (third witness for prosecution) to find the parents of the girl and that I and fourth accused would go to Aro to find Okpani. We all went away and I left the girl in the house of Ude Okafor (fifth witness for prosecution) who is an Aro and our country man. . . . When I got to Aro I found that Okpani had gone to Calabar. We waited for eighteen days but could not see Okpani. He had, we heard, gone elsewhere from Calabar. We returned to Ada [Edda] but found that Udorie had run away and that she and Ude Okafor (sixth witness for prosecution) had been taken to Okigwi. We were preparing to find first accused when a police constable arrested us. I did not know that the girl had been stolen or found on the road. I have never stolen anything in my life.

The evidence of the fourth accused, Wokocho, was as follows:

I am an Aro living at Ada [Edda]. I used to live with second accused to sell cam wood. Early one morning first accused and Irechuku (third witness for prosecution)

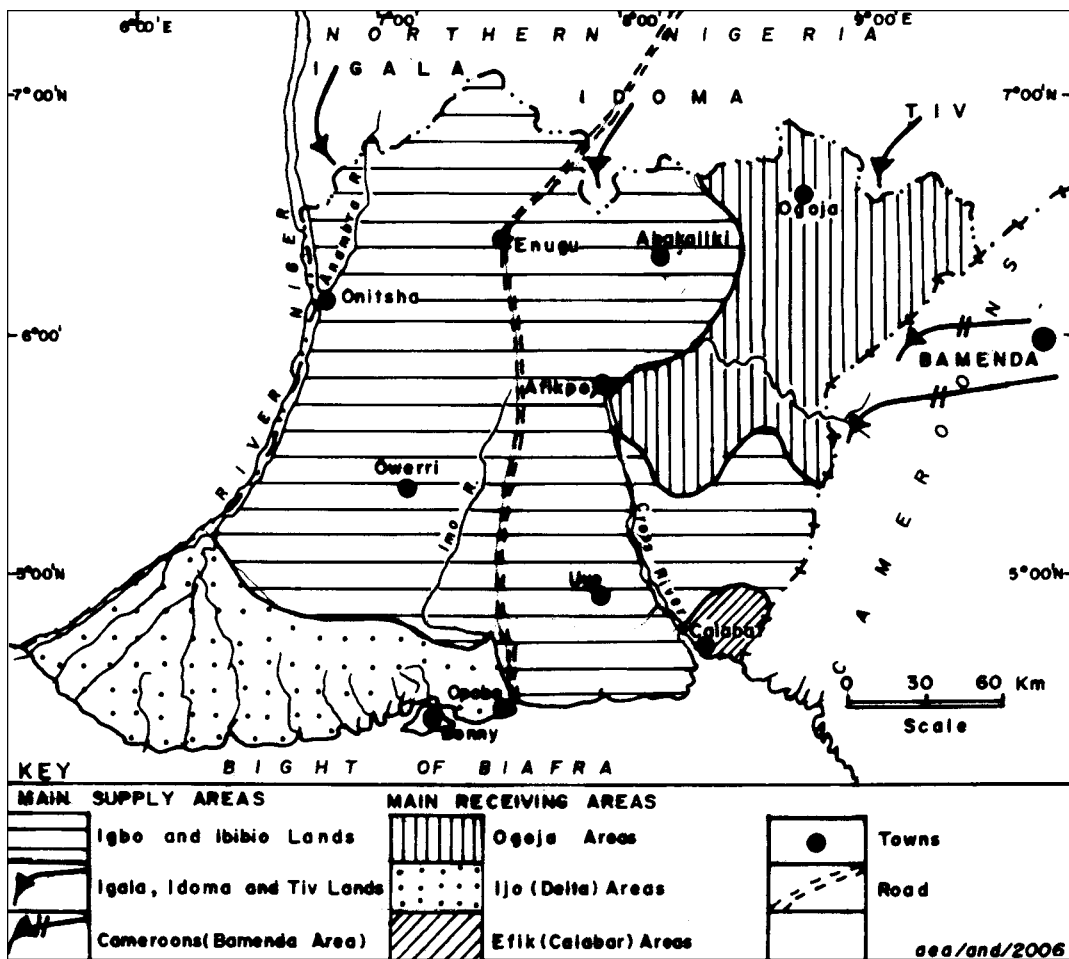
brought Odorie (second witness for prosecution) to our house. I told them that Okpani had not come. First accused said that they had brought a girl to offer to Okpani in marriage. Second accused said that the girl was for him and asked them which was the father of the girl. First accused said that the father had died but that the mother was alive. Second accused then told first accused and Irechuku (third witness for prosecution) to call the parents of the girl. We refused to let the first accused and Irechuku (third witness for prosecution) leave the child with us so we all went to Ada [Edda]. Okpani was not at Edda—and second accused told first accused and third witness for prosecution to fetch the girl's parents and we said second accused and I that we would fetch Okpani. First accused and third witness for prosecution went back and we, second accused and I, took the girl to Ude Okafor's (sixth witness for prosecution's) house—and we asked the latter to look after the girl. We went to Aro and found Okpani had gone to Calabar. We stayed eighteen days at Aro there we found that Okpani had gone to Ute Ada. We then left for Ute Ada—We did not find Okpani; we heard that Okpani had gone to Uzuakoli. When we went to Ude Okafor's house, we found that police had arrested Ude Okafor and taken him and the child to Obubra. We were arrested before we could find first accused.

At the conclusion of the proceedings, the court found Diribeofor Mgbekwe (first accused) guilty as charged and sentenced him to seven years' imprisonment with hard labor. The other three accused were freed on grounds of insufficient evidence.

This was, without doubt, an epic case and one with interesting details, which parallel those contained in the narrative associated with the personal experiences of Olaudah Equiano (now, however, disputed as personal experiences) from the time he was supposed to have been kidnapped with his sister at Essaka to the time he got to the delta where he was bought by a European slaver for transportation to the New World in the eighteenth century. It may be true that the district officer, Okigwi, Mr. M. H. Martindale, following the legal procedures and technicalities of the colonial regime, could find enough evidence to convict only Diribeofor. But there is, perhaps, no doubt that all the four who were charged, and Irechukwu, who was clearly an accomplice, formed part of a slave trading network at the head of which was the elusive Okpani, who could not be found even by the time of the trial, or apparently even later. It was unlikely that Okpani would place an order for a girl "to marry" in the way presented in the story, or that without previous knowledge gained from similar deals Diribeofor and Irechukwu would have known where to look for Okpani at Uzuakoli or would have gained access so easily to Jack Ngwu's house at the unholy hour of four in the morning, or that, like the proverbial minutemen, Jack Ngwu and Wokocha would have left all they were doing to embark on the eighteen-day hunt for Okpani. Also, as the administration knew very well, the entire proceeding that was supposed to be about giving out the hapless girl in marriage was contrary to Igbo practice and usage in the matter.

The campaign for the abolition of the slave trade through the ordinance was totally dependent on chance—that is, on the chance that at some point in the

illicit business something would go wrong and thus bring the culprits face to face with the law. In the four examples cited here, the criminals got into trouble through what some may call foolishness or excessive audaciousness, not because of the vigilance of any colonial agent or agency. In the case of Udorie, it is astonishing that the criminals and their victim were able, as in many other cases, possibly numbering in the hundreds, to make the long and tortuous trek from Okigwi in Okigwi Division, Owerri Province, through Uzuakoli and Edda in Bende Division, also in Owerri Province, to Osimatom in Obubra Division of Ogoja Province without being discovered. Yet this was a zone in which the administration claimed to maintain a special alert in the matter because it was known to lie more or less at the heart of the Aro trade network. It is no surprise indeed that the death of the slave trade in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland was a slow and painful one. In chapter 5 an attempt will be made to trace the details of this slaving network in the 1930s. The vibrancy of the network even as late as this period suggests that there must have been hundreds, if not indeed thousands, of victims—especially women and children—who were caught in this vicious net like Udorie in the thirty or thirty-five years after the Aro Expedition and who were not as lucky as Udorie, whose name means “the peace of the second day of the Igbo four-day week.”



Map 3. South Eastern Nigeria around 1930 showing major slave supplying and slave receiving areas. © Ambrose Dibia of the Department of Geography, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

5

THE HINTERLAND PHASE III: COURTS AND CONSTABLES, 1933–50

The third phase in the campaign against the slave trade in the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra marked a return to the approach in which direct action was taken against the traffic instead of waiting on the general progress of what was called education and civilization to uproot the evil more or less painlessly in the course of time. And it may well be that the case of the “lucky” Udorie, which took place in Okigwi Division, had something to do with it for, in the Annual Report of Owerri Province for 1932 (the year of the celebrated case), the Resident, Mr. O. W. Firth, had reported to the government that “In Okigwi Division there has been a considerable increase in the number of cases of slave dealing and child stealing. These crimes are particularly common in the Obowo area where there appear to be gangs who carry on a steady trade in stolen children.”¹ In consequence of this astounding revelation, the lieutenant-governor of the Southern Provinces caused the Resident to make further inquiries into the matter and report back to him. Perhaps even more shocking in their details were the reports that followed. The district officer for Okigwi revealed that during the month of May 1933 he had held a meeting of all the heads of towns in the Obowo area to discuss the matter with them, and that “they [had] vociferously affirmed that slave dealing and child stealing was much too prevalent.” They had gone further to give an account of how the trade was conducted and the routes which the traders used to distribute their human wares:

Obowo (Abadaba) was a sort of clearing centre where the parties are collected before being taken to Umuahia to be sold. The system appears to be that the children are stolen from the area South West of Obowo in this Division or from the North Eastern area of Owerri Division; pass[ed] through agents in Obowo; and are then hustled over the Imo River to Umuokpara in Bende Division. From Umuokpara they are taken to Item, Umuahia or Uzuakoli and thence usually into the Obubra area where they are [bought and] adopted by childless families.²

According to the heads of the Obowo towns, the evil had increased “because the accused so very seldom are convicted when they are sent for trial in the Resident’s court even though they [might] have previously admitted the offence before the Native Courts and before the District Officer making the preliminary investigation.” Consequently, the chiefs pointed out, “such men frequently return to their towns after acquittal and twit the father of the stolen child that they have ‘eaten’ the money acquired by the sale of the child, and that they are going to do the same in regard to other children.”³

In a similar manner the district officer, Owerri, Major H. C. Stevenson, said that slave dealing and child stealing were common, even though he was unable to say whether the existing situation represented a worsening of conditions that had existed since the imposition of colonial rule. But what is important is that he did not think the evil could be successfully fought unless the government was prepared to set up a special body or task force for the purpose instead of relying, as hitherto, only on prosecuting the few unlucky dealers who were caught by administrative officers in the normal course of going about government business. First, Stevenson argued, a greater blow would be dealt to the evil trade if government could catch and punish the kingpins in the business rather than just the small men who ran errands for them by assembling their wares in ones and twos. “Child stealers,” he went on, “must be sure of a means of speedily disposing of their prey and this seems to indicate that there must be one or two central agencies, probably in the Bende Division; if the men responsible for organizing the trade are caught and receive adequate sentences, the effect will be far greater than a mere conviction of underlings.”⁴ In his view the task in hand was of such importance, especially from the standpoint of upholding the reputation of the government before the people, to justify the setting up of a special police squad, under a senior officer of assistant commissioner rank, which would be given the power and the resources to pursue the necessary enquiries from division to division and if need be from province to province. “The chief consideration,” he went on, “must be to obtain as much information about the trade as possible and then to bring the principal parties to justice; to this end it may be necessary for the officer engaged to refrain from making any arrests until he has obtained a good knowledge of the routes followed and the general organization of slave dealers.” To be successful, he pointed out, this plan would “require secrecy, co-operation between Administrative and Police Officers and the use of the best detectives available.” “I submit,” he concluded, “that, to preserve the reputation of British justice alone, it is essential that vigorous action be taken; the people are now debarred from recourse to the Native Courts about any matter connected with child stealing and if their appeals to their Administrative Officers meet with no satisfactory response they will lose faith in our good intentions.”⁵ With the matter beginning to assume such importance, it was thought necessary to bring all the Eastern Provinces into the discussion. In consequence, the Residents of Calabar,

Ogoja, and Onitsha Provinces were asked for their opinions. From their contributions the government was again fed the same information it already had, that “the large Uburu market in the Afikpo Division of the Ogoja Province was the chief clearing centre and that from there the stolen children are taken by little known paths to the Cross River.”⁶

After extensive consultations and discussions on the issue, the views of Major H. C. Stevenson, the district officer for Owerri, on strategy and mode of approach were adopted by the government. Following from this, Major J. W. Garden, assistant commissioner of police, was appointed to head a squad of “specially selected . . . constables in plain clothes,” which was assembled to investigate the matter “unaffected by Provincial and Divisional boundaries.” His brief was, in specific terms, to investigate “the activities of slave dealers and child stealers in the Owerri, Calabar, Ogoja and Onitsha Provinces.” In the end the campaign lasted some twenty-seven months, from November 1933 to May 1936, with some breaks. Major Garden served from November 1933 to April 1934, Mr. C. R. Bell from September 1934 to January 1935, Mr. S. P. George from January 1935 to July 1935, and Mr. H. Haydock-Wilson from October 1935 to May 1936. Owing to such exigencies of the service as shortage of personnel and the necessity for European officers to take periodic home leave to recoup their health, it was impossible to achieve continuity in the campaign. Not surprisingly, the results achieved varied from officer to officer. And indeed but for the determination of the governor, the inspector-general of police, who was reluctant to assign such senior members of his staff to a duty which he thought belonged more appropriately to the political service, would have terminated the campaign after Major Garden’s tour. But all said and done, the combined work and achievements of the four officers and their men were an eye-opener. In the matter of the campaign against the slave trade, the government and its agencies had been both complacent and presumptuous—complacent in the sense that in spite of the knowledge that the evil traffic was embedded in the economic and social life of the people, no attempt was made to understand in detail the organization that supported it and to strike directly at that organization and the men who ran it, beyond the haphazard campaign against the Aro Long Juju. The government was also presumptuous, in believing that the *pax Britannica* and the slave trade were so incompatible that the sheer imposition of British peace would immediately spell the doom of the traffic. Even if the two were so completely incompatible, there were many parts of the region that did not feel the presence of the British for more than two decades after the so-called effective military occupation of the region, which itself took about two decades to achieve. Thus one of the things which the police campaign achieved was to show how hollow this complacency and this presumptuousness were.

The setting up of the campaign also revealed something else about the government that is quite disturbing. As already pointed out, the campaign was expected to cover the four eastern provinces of Calabar, Ogoja, Onitsha, and

Owerri but in practice it came to be confined to Owerri Province because the Residents of the three other provinces claimed that while the trade still went on in the areas under their jurisdiction it was not on the increase as was reported from Owerri Province. In other words, the police campaign was undertaken not because the government was shocked to find out that the evil traffic still went on under its nose, but because the traffic was on the increase. Had there been no increase, therefore, the special effort would not have been made. Thus the government would appear to have more or less come to accept the existence of a certain amount of slave trading as normal life, just as it had come to accept the fact of former slaves continuing to live in a state of slavery in spite of what the antislavery legislation said, as long as none of the parties to the evil complained. From the information gathered by the special police squad and by the divisional administrations that gave it support, we are in a position to present a clear picture of the state of the traffic in the fourth decade of British rule in southeastern Nigeria. From this, one may be able to draw conclusions regarding certain aspects of the trade during the first, second, and third decades of the twentieth century.

The first point that should be noted is that the Aro emerged from the findings as still the principal collectors of slaves in southeastern Nigeria. In places they depended on well-known local agents who were non-Aro but who nonetheless were experienced hands in the business and whose compounds were principal collecting centers. In other places the Aro lived among the people to handle the collection themselves and at times also used local desperadoes to lure away and kidnap children for sale. "In almost all cases . . . which were investigated," noted the secretary for the Southern Provinces in his summary of reports coming in from the field, "Aro-Chuku men were involved."⁷ In January 1934, Major Garden reported, many parents had informed him that "they prefer to deal with the Aro people as the latter were prepared to pay a higher price than that offered by local people."⁸ In Alike Obowo, one of those mentioned as running the traffic was a certain Inyama, who by his name was clearly an Aro man. For the Abakaliki area, the heads of two Aro settlements around Etchi Alike were said to preside over the transactions on the slave routes that ran from the Northern Provinces through Idoma and Abakaliki to the upper Cross River. "In connection with the Etchi Alike routes," reported Major Garden, "I would ask [that] the Assistant Commissioner of Police, Abakaliki, should give attention to those of the headmen of the Aro settlers at Etchi Alike. The name is said to be Ndi Ofo but I have had difficulty in obtaining satisfactory information as to the name. The headman of all Aros in the Ikwo area is one Okoronkwo whose house is near Igbeni market. These two men are reputed agents."⁹ We may also remember that it was an Aro, Okpani, who placed with Diribeofor Mgbeke the order that led to the kidnapping of Udorie from the Police Barracks, Okigwi. In April 1934, Major Garden reported the arrest of "an Aro man with two women and two small children . . . at Imo [River] en route for Okrika."¹⁰

Major Garden also talked of a “small girl from Ngodo [in Okigwi] with her parents [being] found near Bende marching to Aro-Chuku in company with an Aro man. The usual excuse that the child was to act as a nurse maid was given.” “The parents,” said Major Garden, “were warned and sent [back] to their home with the child.”¹¹ In other words, with respect to the control of the traffic, nothing much had changed. The Aro still controlled its commanding heights just as they had in the precolonial period. Also there were, as formerly, hundreds of local agents who roamed the villages collecting victims for onward transmission to the Aro, who served as the primary middlemen and took the victims to the ultimate consumers. Among the non-Aro participants in the trade were parents who put out their children for sale, and then others who bought such children or engaged in the kidnapping of children or did both for onward transmission to the Aro. We encounter the names of many such people in the list of notorious slave dealers compiled by the police squad in the course of their campaign against the traffic.

The sources of supply for the slave trade in the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra in this period were both internal and external. With respect to the internal sources, the entire Eastern Provinces, of course, constituted a single market, in spite of the effort of the Residents of Onitsha and Calabar Provinces to suggest that the areas under them were cleaner than Owerri Province in this regard. We have already mentioned their claim that much as something remained of the trade in their provinces, it was nothing like the crying scandal in Owerri Province. A little later the Resident of Calabar Province, Mr. G. G. Shute, told the lieutenant-governor that it was “the general opinion of [his] District Officers that the Province is not concerned in the supply of slaves, that the inhabitants do not sell their children, either for religious or other reasons, and that child stealing is practically unknown.”¹² Unfortunately this “holier than thou” attitude is not in accordance with the facts. For instance, it is known that the Efik plantations at Akpabuyo continued to receive slaves until the period of the Second World War. It is also known that the abhorrence of twins among the Efik-Ibibio continued under colonial rule in spite of whatever was the impact of *pax Britannica* and that since these twins could not so easily be destroyed as had previously been the case, many of them were sold or given away to the Aro and other dealers. These men took them beyond the communities in which they were born and disposed of them to the dealers’ best advantage. In addition, in the course of the police campaign set up for Owerri Province, Akpan Udo, a boy of twelve years of age from Ikot Ekpene, was recovered from around Bende after he had succeeded in running away from those who had kidnapped him and were taking him toward Aro Chukwu for sale. According to his story, he was from the town of Mbiabong Ukam, was stolen by a certain Ekandem, and had been in captivity for two weeks before his escape and rescue. The district officer, Ikot Ekpene, confirmed the boy’s story.¹³ There was also the case of Chief Bassey Duke Ephraim, said to be a prominent Efik chief, who was caught and

sentenced to imprisonment in the Bamenda Province of the Cameroons. He had gone there on slave dealing business bearing an Aro name.¹⁴ Thus it is quite likely that some of the persons described as Aro in this whole business were actually not Aro, especially bearing in mind, if the records of the colonial service are to be believed, the high incidence of impersonation even of the European staff which characterized the first thirty years or so of British rule in the region. It must also be remembered that the Aro had many settlements in Ibibioland in the precolonial period. These settlements did not cease to exist as a result of the British conquest, and there is nothing to suggest that the Aro in this zone, unlike their brothers elsewhere in the region, had abandoned this their ancient occupation overnight.

A similar case can be made in respect of Onitsha Province in the matter of continued active involvement in the slave trade up to the end of the period covered by this study. There were also cases of recent victims from this province recovered from the upper Cross River in the course of the police campaign of the middle thirties. Oral information from Onitsha Province, like similar information from other parts of the region, makes it quite clear that throughout the 1930s the threat of being kidnapped by men carrying long baskets or big jute bags was a constant one for children who had no adult surveillance or wandered away from such surveillance.¹⁵ In 1937, that is, over a year after the special police squad had been disbanded, clear evidence came to light that, as we argue in this paragraph and the one preceding it, the Onitsha and Calabar Provinces were indeed still menaced by slave traders of all types. Thus, while the statistics for that year showed that the five divisions of Owerri Province (i.e., Aba, Ahoada, Bende, Degema, and Okigwi), had only five persons charged in the courts for slave dealing, none of whom was convicted, the Onitsha High Court convicted two persons and discharged three, while Ikot Ekpene Division in Calabar Province convicted eight and discharged thirty-one. In other words, the slave trade and slave traders were alive and well in all the provinces throughout the fourth decade of the twentieth century.¹⁶

But then, because the campaign focused on Owerri Province, we have a great deal more information on that unit as a source for the children who had become the main victims of this traffic from about the middle twenties. The key supply locales were distributed among the four principal divisions of the province—Okigwi, Bende, Owerri, and Aba. In Okigwi Division the main supply areas were Isu in the Orlu district, Isuochi in the Okigwi district, and Obowo, also in the Okigwi district. In Owerri Division the area described in the records as “the North East” of the division but known from about the late thirties or so as Mbaise supplied most of the victims. Major H. C. Stevenson, reporting after he became the Resident of Owerri Province, noted that “It was in consequence of the number of complaints made to me, when District Officer, of the prevalence of child-stealing in the Ekwereazu and Ezinihitte areas that I made representations which led to the posting of a police officer to deal with the problem.”¹⁷

In Aba, the storm area was Ngwa. When Captain George suggested in one of his reports that Aba was more or less free of this evil, the acting district officer for Aba, Mr. Godfrey C. Allen, was forced to refute this suggestion:

I am not in agreement with paragraph 5 of the Report. According to my experience which has admittedly not been as specialised as that of Captain George, large numbers of young men, either traders or farmers, are employed by Aro slave traders as agents. These young men are usually ordered to reside in certain fixed areas and to take every available opportunity of seizing unescorted children, afterwards delivering them to their employer for sale. This menace has recently become so acute in Northern Ngwa, which lies some ten miles south of Umuahia, that the people have repeatedly informed me that they dare not allow their children to venture even as far as the local water supply unless escorted by an adult. They allege that small children seized by these young scoundrels are often bound and hidden within large baskets which can be seen secured to the carrier of many cycles frequenting the main roads of this area and I was frequently urged to rule that any young man seen with one of the baskets could be stopped and the basket searched. I have also been present on one occasion at the arrest of two young men, alleged to be traders, who were caught escaping from an Ngwa village with the small child of a local resident. These young men had recently settled in the locality, ostensibly for the purpose of legitimate trade, but they were obviously in the employ of one of these professional traders. I understand they have as yet refused to divulge the identity of their employer.¹⁸

For the Bende Division, the supply area was said to be Umuahia, where the practice of parents selling their own children was said to be more common than the evil of kidnapping. In this connection, Major Garden was reported to have found “that in the Umuahia area parents are in the habit of disposing of their children under the guise of marriage, taking no interest in whether or not the children are passed on to a third person. . . . in almost all cases of this description which were investigated Aro-Chuku men were involved.”¹⁹

The external sources of supply were the two already mentioned in this work. One was the Northern Provinces, especially the areas inhabited by the Igala, the Idoma, and the Tiv (the Munshi of colonial literature). This area, as already shown by various studies of the precolonial trade of the zone,²⁰ had been for centuries part of an economic, and especially trade, network that ran from the Benue to the Atlantic. This network became particularly active in the course of the nineteenth century; especially in its slave trading aspect, thanks to the wars associated with the Islamic jihad, which yielded a rich harvest of slaves, many of which had to be marched south for disposal. In the early colonial years, officers in the border provinces and districts of the Northern Protectorate kept on drawing attention to the existence of this trade, that is to say that the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra and the southeastern provinces of Northern Nigeria formed “a common market” insofar as this evil traffic was concerned.²¹ But there is no surviving evidence of any effort on the

part of the government to tackle it. The special police squad on this matter which is the subject of this chapter found that the traditional sources of supply from the North had remained active until the 1930s. The other external source of supply was the Bamenda region of the Cameroons. This was also an area whose economy was linked to that of the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra. Communities said to have been involved in this supply included Mamfe, Nsanakang, Otu, Okan, Nfemenyeng, Etaka, Abijan, and Abarakpa. The supply was said to be in the hands of middlemen who shuttled back and forth meeting the needs of the upper Cross River. Working on the political organization of the Mbembe of Ogoja two or three decades later, Rosemary Harris uncovered more information showing that this was a long-established and important slave route between what later became Nigeria and what later became the Cameroons. According to her informants, the people of Ikom and Okuni were the middlemen on this route to whom the Aro and the Efik gave on trust trade goods with which they then went into the Cameroons. There they exchanged the goods for slaves whom they marched up to the Cross River, where they handed them over to the Aro and the Efik who led them away. According to the same informants, slaves were unarguably the most important item carried by this route.²²

Perhaps intimately related to the source of supply was the mode of supply or the mode of procurement. If, as claimed by the early colonial authorities, warfare and raiding were major modes of procuring slaves in this area in the past, they ceased to exist on the morrow of the colonial conquest. Similarly, the repeated destruction of their groves had by this time taken care of much of the menace of oracles as recruiting centers for slaves. Consequently, we hear nothing about these methods in the 1930s. From the available evidence, only two methods were in vogue at this time—kidnapping (or what the records describe as child-stealing and the Igbo as *ito mmadu*) and the practice of parents selling and pawning their children. Perhaps each of these two modes of procurement was as old as the slave trade in Igbo culture. Even people born in the late 1930s grew up, in the fourth decade of the twentieth century, to face the threat of being kidnapped by the Aro or their agents or by both, in any case by people who carried long baskets (*abo* or *ukpa*) and/or big jute bags (*akpa big-bag* in Igbo). Those of us who started school in 1944 were still warned to go to and come from school in groups for fear of kidnapers and head hunters. It was the same story as we went to fetch water from the stream or to fetch firewood from the bush. Indeed, in the latter case we were also required to check our numbers before entering the bush and to repeat the exercise before setting out for home, in order to establish that none of us had been spirited away by slave catchers as we spread out in the bush to look for firewood.²³ In *Trade without Rulers*, which deals mainly with the slave trade in southeastern Nigeria in the period before about 1860, David Northrup says that the survival of memories of kidnapping in this region into the twentieth century was indicative of the importance of this mode of procuring slaves.²⁴

Our material shows that it was not only the memory and the fear that went with it that survived. The practice of it survived also.

The other mode of procurement, disposal of children by their parents, had two aspects—outright sale from the beginning of the transaction, or pawning. As measures against the slave trade and pawning became more stringent under the British, it became fashionable to disguise these two aspects as “marriage” where the children involved were female. Writing on this kind of “marriage” in a case that had cropped up in the Opobo Division of Calabar Province in 1930, District Officer P. I. M. Milne reported:

I, personally, have never had any previous instances brought to my notice of girls being “married” and taken away in their infancy by their “husbands” . . . All the Ibibio chiefs of standing with whom I have discussed the situation are unanimous in stating that the present cases are a survival of the days when Bonny, Andoni and Opobo men bought girls from the Ibibios as slaves. It is their view that the practice is most undesirable and contrary to native law and custom with regard to the proper performance of marriage rites.²⁵

This suggests that in the area under study a great deal must have taken place that never caught the attention of the administration. The present writer grew up after the Second World War to hear, in and around the northern parts of Okigwi Division, of *I ga di n'Ijom* (being married into Ijo or the Delta), which was synonymous with being sold. This was a treatment that parents meted out not only to young girls but also to young women who had failed to attract husbands (*ndi azhi gbara*) and to those mature girls who, in the words of Godfrey Allen (district officer in Bende Division), had become in the hands of their parents “a frozen asset.”²⁶

When it came to the question of the markets for slaves in the region, the administration, for the most part knew of two or talked mostly of two—Uzuakoli and Bende, with the latter having declined calamitously as soon as the government made it a divisional headquarters. But with the special police investigations, it came to dawn on the government that there were other markets, in addition to Uzuakoli, which had apparently survived or defied all attempts to suppress or purify them. At the top of the list of these others was, as shown in the previous chapter, Nkwuroto Uburu in Afikpo Division, which was a large regional market noted for the distribution of salt, locally woven cloth assembled from the Nsukka and Abakaliki Divisions, horses brought in from the Northern Provinces, and food items of various descriptions from the surrounding area. Then came Umuokpara in Umuahia Division. Thus, instead of worrying only about Uzuakoli, the government now also had to worry about and police Uburu and Umuokpara.²⁷ For some strange reason, the government never found out about three other markets whose dark reputation in this regard, and even in regard to the sale of human parts used for occult practices and spells, survived till the 1950s or even later. Here we have

in mind the markets of Orié Amaraku and Afor Umunna in Okigwi and Eke Imeoha in Abakaliki. Even today the boast is still abroad that there is nothing you want that you cannot buy from Afor Umuna and Orié Amaraku *if* you know your way around. In fact, the two criminals who had kidnapped two children from a village in Okwe and were caught, prosecuted, and convicted and whose case we discussed in chapter 4, were actually taking their victims straight to Afor Umuna for immediate disposal. U. I. Chima, an Ezza indigene and a student of Ezza history, has written that

Eke Imoha was the biggest and the largest market in Abakaliki at the time. It was a market probably developed by the Aro. Centred at the circuit of Aro trade routes, it served as a slave market for Ezza and its neighbours. The Aro patronized the market bringing in imported goods and bought slaves and livestock. Eke Imoha was held every four days unlike the other markets in Ikwo and Izzi . . . which the Aro rarely attended which were held every eight days. Goods from these surrounding areas were brought to Eke where they were bartered for.²⁸

Apart from finding out that they now not only had to worry about Uzuakoli as a slave market, the government also acquired more information on how slave dealing in the various markets took place. “The popular belief that children are sold actually in Uburu market may be discounted,” wrote Major Garden. He went on:

This market is held every twenty four days and is undoubtedly a meeting place where negotiations are commenced. Here agents from the Cross River meet parents and other agents from Bende and Okigwi Divisions when orders are placed. When a suitable child has been found further meetings take place on the next Uburu market day and the child who is usually in a house in the district is handed over at night and started off on the journey to Obubra Division.²⁹

But of course there were, judging by evidence from oral information, astounding occasional departures from this procedure in cases where those for sale were male adults. Such men, I was informed, were usually recruited as carriers and made to carry bundles of rubbish which were camouflaged to look like priceless items of commerce. The agreement usually was that they would receive their pay after delivering the goods to the buyers. In the market, each one was made to stand by his own load, thus making it possible for the slave dealers to know which carrier they were talking about as they bargained as if they were pricing or haggling over the bundles of rubbish. At the conclusion of each bargain the carrier concerned would be asked to move his load to a supposedly nearby settlement visible or almost visible from the market and come back quickly to rejoin his mates and receive his pay. That way the man ended up as a slave before he knew it. That, I was told, was how many adult victims who were used in burying the dead in the 1920s and 1930s were procured. What we may call “the double market location” described by Major

Garden had also been chanced upon by Mr. R. Granville who served in the Aro Chukwu District in the first decade of the British imperial presence in the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra.³⁰

These were not the only dodges the slave dealers invented or used to evade the vigilance of the colonial administration. The key element in the two dodges described above was secrecy and they went to great lengths to ensure this from the beginning to the end of each transaction. The handing over and movement of victims for the most part took place at night, especially where the movement involved taking the victim through a village or settlement where he or she was likely to be recognized by or recognize someone. This, as we shall see, was one of the areas in which the government got it wrong when it kept on talking of routes followed by the culprits. There were routes and yet there were no routes, for when necessary the dealers disappeared into the bush with their victims only to re-emerge as they reached what they considered a safe zone. It is thus not surprising that on many occasions when the government laid an ambush for them along their supposedly established routes; it found itself clutching at empty air. On his experience in this regard, Mr. H. Haydock-Wilson, assistant commissioner of police, reported:

At Umuahia, which was again visited, an informer stated that he would lead the police to a track which was being used by night by child-stealers to convey children through Amachara. A time was fixed and an ambush was made but no one was seen although I walked along the track with two constables for some distance until dawn. Further visits were made to this particular track without results.³¹

Haydock-Wilson thought this was because of faulty information, obviously showing ignorance of a local proverb, which says that when hunters learn to shoot without missing, their quarry learns to fly or run without perching or halting. In this case the quarry was in a position to know the state of things in advance. News of the movement of the white man most times preceded him. The slave dealers also had their own early warning systems. On this Major Garden reported as follows:

Various routes are used and great precautions are taken to guard against interference on the part of the police. In many cases the children travel with women who pose as their mothers or sisters, the children being threatened with death if they complain. Cyclists and armed men are known to have aided as scouts on the routes to the Cross River to warn traffickers of police or others likely to interfere.³²

Beyond all this, the slave dealers had at their disposal the ultimate weapon that the peoples of this region had in their armory for guaranteeing secrecy—the blood covenant. Major Garden reported that “The parties to the transactions swear secrecy on various jujus and in some cases cut their skin to draw blood, each person touching the blood of the other with their lips.”³³ This

covenant was gone into not only between the primary supplier of the forbidden item and the middleman, or between the middleman and the ultimate taker of the goods, but on occasions as many times as the victim changed hands.

By the time of these investigations there were three main destinations for the victims of the traffic. The major one, it would appear, was what may be called the upper Cross River region stretching from Ikom through Agwa'agune or Akunakuna to Obubra. It was to this region that victims of the trade from Calabar Province, the southern provinces of Northern Nigeria, from the Bamenda area of the Cameroons, Nsukka Division, and the Nkanu and Nike areas of Udi Division as well as many of those who came from Umuahia, Okigwi, and Ngwa and northeastern Owerri Division went. The rest of those who came from Owerri Province and Onitsha Province were shared between the Ijo states of the eastern part of the delta of the Niger and the region called in this period "Kwale-Ijaw" or the western delta, with the eastern delta taking the lion's share.³⁴ But certainly the dispersal of the victims was more widespread and more diffused than the picture given here or in the records. There was no law stipulating that slaves from a particular region must be taken for sale to another particular region. Different areas continued to receive slaves for different purposes and from different zones as before—as supplements to the labor available in the family, for burying the dead, for consecration to the gods, and so on. It was known that Aro Chukwu itself continued to take in slaves as hands needed to help harvest palm fruit bunches both at home and in their "colonies" in Ibibioland. The Efik plantations at Akpabuyo and Odukpani also continued to receive slaves, just as did the main Efik states, where the slaves were needed for pulling trade canoes in the creeks.

The government talked of having identified the main routes followed by the traders at this time. For the slaves assembled from Okigwi, Aba, and Owerri Divisions as well as from the Umuahia region of Bende Division, the main staging post was said to be Amachara in Umuahia. From there the distribution to the three main destinations described above was undertaken using the following routes:

1. Amachara—Uzuakoli—Abiriba—the Cross River (i.e., Obubra, Agwa'agune or Akunakuna, and Ikom);
2. Amachara—Imo River or Aba—the delta (i.e., Okrika, Degema, Kalabari, etc.); and
3. Amachara—Oguta and Urashi River—"Kwale-Ijaw."

As these routes moved further away from Amachara they tended to branch out in many directions. For instance, the route going northward to the Cross River had a branch that led through Uburu, after which it virtually became a maze with branches going through Akpuoha, Oziza, and the Cross River to Agwa'agune; or through Edda and Usukpan and Ikun to the same Agwa'agune;

and then through Aba Omege and Itigidi to Obubra. The supply from outside the Eastern Provinces was independent of the supply for which Amachara was the main staging post. From the Bamenda grassfields there were two routes, both leading to the Cross River. One ran from Bamenda via Mamfe, Nsanakang, Otu, Okan, Nfemenyen, Eteka, Abijan, and Abaragba; while the other ran from Bamenda through Nsan to Abia. The traders bringing slaves from the Northern Provinces were said to “pass from Idoma to Nkalagu via Effium,” from where they used two routes to get into Afikpo Division on their way to Uburu, one going through Onicha and Ohafia while the other went through Nkerefi. There was still another route from the North, which ran from Idoma to Etchi Alike via Ishieke Izzi and Edda Izzi. From the last-mentioned town, the route branched into two—one going to Ikom and the Obubra area on the Cross River via Ogurale and the other going to Itigidi, also on the Cross River, via Okpa-Itumo Ikwo and Abomege.³⁵

In spite of the impression given in the records about regular routes, it is perhaps safest to take the towns mentioned as standing on these routes as just major and minor staging posts, that is, centers with well-known dealers and at times also with well-known markets (such as Uburu, Uzuakoli, Akparabong, etc.) to which dealers repaired by any road they considered safe or convenient or both for the time being to make sales or take and place orders and so on. The dealers were very pragmatic and resourceful, as they had to be in order to be able to elude the watchful eyes of officials of the colonial government. Whereas the government deluded itself and believed that the roads and the railway that it constructed could not be used by the slave dealers because of the constant surveillance of the police and the administrative staff, the slave dealers actually integrated these routes into their network. As Major Garden found out, they used the railway in making contact by means of runners, or indeed to move children meant for the delta as far as Umukurushi where they dismounted to make the rest of the journey on foot and by boat to Okrika.³⁶ Also their agents using bicycles and plying the main roads moved children hidden in long baskets to disposal points. From one of Mr. Bell’s reports, we have clear evidence of this engaging resourcefulness and versatility of the slave dealers in the matter of methods and routes which made it so difficult to track them down:

Stolen children are brought from Obowo to Amachara by bush path to Amuze, cross the Imo River either by small native made bridge or by canoe, by bush path to Utahan and bush path to Amachara. A distance of 7 miles. Parents desirous of selling their children usually use the main road from Obowo to Amachara and bring their children either on foot or by lorry. From Amachara the children are taken by bush path to Okohuga, bush path to Uzuakoli, bush path to Bende and bush path to Aro Chuku. The journey taking about 2 days. Children going to Okrika are usually taken from Amachara to Umuahia Halt by bush path and then by railway to Umu Koroshe. From Umu Koroshe they are taken by bush path to Mboli and from

there to Okrika by canoe. A woman usually accompanies the seller and the children and passes as the mother of the children.³⁷

Apart from seeking to identify the sources of supply, the regions of demand, and the routes of distribution, the government also made an attempt to understand why there continued to be such a heavy demand for slaves, especially among the peoples of the upper Cross River whose capacity for taking in slave children appeared to have overtaken that of the communities along and around the Bight of Biafra. In the end they found three main explanations. One was that according to the social and cultural usages of the region, owning one or more slaves still conferred social prestige, making it possible for such a person to buy membership of different secret societies in the locality. Many such societies still ruled the life of the people in spite of the supposed dawn of modern times through the onset of colonial rule. “To own a slave” in Obubra Division, reported Major Garden,

is looked upon as a sign of wealth, this also applies to Ikom Division and to have any social standing in the community a person must own one or more slaves. Two secret societies, one the Oboribori and the other [the] Ekpoti club exist in Obubra Division. One of the qualifications for membership to these clubs is the ownership of one or more slaves.³⁸

A second explanation was what was described as the loose morality of the women, which made them take up prostitution as a profession, thus compelling their men to seek wives from outside the region in a bid to find women they could control. It was also said that after having made money from prostitution, the upper Cross River women would finance the purchase of slave girls who would give them and their relations the children they themselves had failed to bear. This was done to ensure the continuation of their lineages. On this Major Garden, again, wrote:

The women of the River towns between Ediba and Akunakuna make a practice of going off to the coast towns as harlots and with all the money made by these women slaves are bought for making farms and for general domestic work. By each coming fortnightly mail from the Gold Coast from 10 to 30 registered letters containing remittances are issued from Afikpo post office to relatives. The village chiefs try to prevent these women from emigrating but the idea has got about that there is more money to be made in the Gold Coast than in Nigeria. The harlots who have made money and have no husbands buy children and bring them up as their own.³⁹

But perhaps it was the celebrated Daryll Forde who provided the government with the ultimate explanation. “Professor Forde, Professor of Anthropology and Geography in the University of Wales,” wrote the secretary for the Southern Provinces, “who has recently been conducting investigations into various customs in the Obubra Division, stated that owing to the matrilineal

system of inheritance, by which all rights to children pass to the mother's side, men desiring children over whom they themselves shall have rights (such as receive bride price etc.) and to whom they may bequeath their own property often buy children and adopt them as their own."⁴⁰

The whole social environment or climate was one that made marriage in this region very unstable, unless the man took a wife from a community outside the upper Cross River area. Writing in 1924 on a similar situation in Ugep, the political officer, Mr. S. T. Harvey noted: "In the old days there was no specified dowry but merely dashes given to the father-in-law, from 8 to 20 rods according to the status of the man. . . . The dowry is made small because whatsoever a woman farms or reaps during her life time is by native custom the property of her parents." On Uwet he said: "There is no fixed dowry with the result that all the Uwet women are after as much as they can get and find that prostitution is much more profitable."⁴¹ In other words, only unions with women from outside the culture area offered anything resembling stability and it was this fact that fueled the apparently insatiable desire for the victims of this trade. The men preferred such women very young because they could then ensure their full immersion in the local culture.

Perhaps to all these we should add a fourth explanation—the fact that the *pax Britannica* made very slow progress here, partly because the region was remote from the palm belt of the south and center where the missions and the traders concentrated their efforts and activities, and partly because of poverty of communication. One consequence of this was that the traditional culture and its economy remained virtually undisturbed for four decades or more. Of this economy, the slave trade and slavery were essential aspects. Remoteness from the main centers of government activity also meant minimal government vigilance, which made it possible for many practices to be carried on with impunity, practices that could not be so pursued in the central and the southern parts of the southeastern region where there was a heavy colonial presence. Among such practices was continued indulgence in the traditional practice of burying the prominent dead with slaves. Up to about the second decade of the twentieth century, such burials used to be accompanied by the slaughter of an astounding number of slaves. The reports compiled in the course of the British police investigations suggested that some of the victims of the slave trade were used in human sacrifice. When Sir Hugh Clifford visited Ikom about 1920, the first governor to do so, the request that the elders made after listening to him included "permission to return to human sacrifice, permission to own slaves again, the abolition of all forestry laws and in fact the repeal practically of all other Government made ordinances."⁴² Thus it can be said that even in the period covered by this study, the region of the upper Cross River perhaps represented the closest approximation to the societies in the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra in their orientation to the slave trade in the centuries when that traffic could be pursued by anyone without let or hindrance.

Similar explanations can be offered for the level of demand that existed in the delta to the south. Here was a society whose economy and culture owed a great deal to the slave trade and slavery. Therefore it can be argued that here, old habits died hard. Both the fishermen and the traders continued to need hands to pull their canoes, catch and dry fish, display and sell their wares. The abolition in 1916 by Frederick Lugard of the House Rule Ordinance, which had sought to shelter the house heads from some of the social and economic consequences not only of abolition but also of some other aspects of British rule, had made this need greater. Furthermore, the delta and the coast generally had become something of a backwater with the successful penetration of the interior by the colonial government. This had led to the shift of centers of political and economic activity to Igboland and Ibibioland. Instead of Calabar, Opobo, Bonny, Degema, and the like, one now heard of Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, Aba, Owerri, Onitsha, Umuahia, Enugu, and so on as the leading centers of political, economic, and social progress. One result was that the degree of government surveillance and vigilance in this whole delta region declined in intensity and effectiveness, thus making it possible for those interested in the slave trade to continue with it without running too much risk of being caught. When we add to this the natural terrain of the zone—dense mangrove forest and maze after maze of creeks and rivulets, one begins to understand how much safer, relatively speaking, it was to engage in the trade here than it was in central Igbo- or Ibibioland. Repeatedly, various officers commenting on this evil and the need to deal a drastic blow at it had suggested targeting the delta states and societies specifically in order to kill the demand as the most effective way of destroying the supply. But not once did the government take this suggestion up.⁴³ Apart from the usual excuses based on shortage of staff, any explanation of this failure must take into account the fact that the government probably found it daunting merely to contemplate what would be required in terms of manpower, material resources, and time to track down persons who had been recently brought into these societies by means of the outlawed trade.

Marriage and inheritance practices here also had a hand in the matter, just as they did in the societies of the upper Cross River. The Ijo, it has been revealed by social anthropologists, had two types of marriage institutions—called small-dowry (*egwa*) and big-dowry (*eya*) marriage. The small-dowry (*egwa*) marriage gave a man precarious or indeed no claims to the children of the union. Furthermore, a freeborn Ijo girl would not ordinarily consent to contract *eya* marriage, as that was looked upon as a kind of slavery. Consequently, men who were intent on getting children they could really call their own had, like their counterparts on the upper Cross River, to go into the hinterland to find wives. Many of them did so by buying Igbo and Ibibio girls, preferring them to be underage so that they could be fully immersed in the local culture and thus be able to rear up “full-blooded” Ijo children as well as to serve their husbands as fully acculturated Ijo wives. We have already drawn

attention to this population factor and its role in persuading Sir Ralph Moor to issue the two curious proclamations aimed at enabling the coastal states to obtain the labor they needed for the purpose of promoting legitimate trade in the interior.

In all, the British investigations revealed that extensive demands for slaves still existed in the southeastern provinces. They were still needed as sacrifices at burials and in the ceremonies of some of the secret societies. Mr. George thought the use of slaves for burial was still common in Okrika, New Calabar, Opobo, Bonny, and Aro Chukwu. The Aro needed slaves for harvesting palm fruits, while as canoe pullers they were in demand throughout the delta and on the Cross River. They were also in demand as foster children, and if they were girls they could be married as wives or put out as prostitutes to earn money. Finally, they still constituted a status symbol, especially in the upper Cross River region, notably Obubra, Ikom, and Bansara.

Perhaps if one explains the fact that the demand for slaves continued to survive under British rule, one should also attempt an explanation of the fact that the supply of slaves also survived. Each case represented the survival of the habits of a bad past. Discussions with various elders in the 1960s revealed that till the end of colonial rule there were many people who did not believe that the new ways marketed by the British had come to stay. Many had the conviction that the British would soon go, thus making it possible for society to go back to what it was during the precolonial period.⁴⁴ The other explanation is demographic. The areas from which the Owerri Province supplies came—Ngwa, Mbaise, Obowo, Isu Orlu, and Isuochi—are among the most densely populated zones of Igboland, which as a whole is said to have one of the densest populations in Africa. Going along with this dense population, except perhaps for the Ngwa area, is poor soil, which meant that families often found themselves saddled with more children than they could conveniently look after. Hence the apparently prevalent practice of parents selling their children. Those families which did not feel completely hopeless in the face of the economic and other challenges of rearing large broods, started by pledging the children as pawns. On occasions the man pledged himself also. But only a thin line separated the pledged child from slavery. And in any case if the pledge were not redeemed within the stipulated time, the pawn could be sold without further ado. This issue of demography was also implicated in the survival of the demand for slaves. Both the upper Cross River region and the delta area had, and still have relative to Igboland and Ibibioland, low population densities. Hence they needed and still need manpower from outside for the exploitation of their environment. In fact, not all the Igbo who went to these areas, either in the precolonial period or in the period covered by this study, did so as victims of the slave trade.

“The supply of children,” wrote the secretary to the Southern Provinces, “is maintained from two sources—stolen children and children sold by their parents. With regard to stolen children it seems fairly clear that while there are

professional dealers and recognised routes for disposal, the stealing is usually done by persons in temporary need of money rather than by professional thieves.⁴⁵ The available evidence, however, does not support the view that at this time there were no professional kidnappers of children. In the first place, Major Garden had left enough indications to the effect that there were persons whose occupation was stealing children and disposing of them as slaves or buying them from parents with a view to resale at a profit.⁴⁶ For instance, he noted that the middlemen “have their own methods and know the people who for a consideration will help them.” Surely where there are professional takers there must be professional suppliers. The Aro were such professional takers, which was why Major Garden, as he wrote his last report on the campaign, “impressed upon the non-commissioned officers and men of the various [police] detachments the necessity for keeping up the pressure against the Aro traffickers.” We also have the evidence of Godfrey Allen, acting district officer for Aba, that in the Aba area some Aro businessmen had in their pay young men whose job it was to kidnap children and pass them on to the businessmen. Furthermore, the Igbo concept of *ndi n’atoro mmadu* (“kidnappers”), which was in general use up to the 1940s, suggested the existence of professional kidnappers.

If economic hardship or financial greed explains kidnapping wholly and completely, does it also explain the practice of parents selling their children? On this the administration was unable to agree. According to Major Garden, “parents sell their children either because they are in urgent need of money or because in present conditions they see little hope of obtaining payment of the bride price on their daughters.”⁴⁷ The difficulty in getting daughters married off, all agreed, had arisen from the fact that with the onset of colonial economic conditions, young men had found themselves in a situation that made it difficult to mobilize early enough in life the funds with which to marry and support families. Another cause of parents selling their children, said Garden, was the insistence of the Christian missionaries on compelling their converts to accept the idea and practice of monogamous marriage. For Major Garden, Mr. H. C. Stevenson, and many other members of the administration, this economic consideration was enough of an explanation for the astounding practice of parents selling children.⁴⁸ But it was not sufficient for Assistant Commissioner of Police S. P. George, who, after detailed investigations in the Isu area of Orlu District and among the Ikeduru of Owerri Division, came to the conclusion that the more important explanation was what he described as “religious”; we shall describe it here as cosmological. According to George, most of the children sold by their parents were those who, by some act of commission or omission, were in breach of time-honored taboos or *nsò* as the Igbo call them. Such children, he correctly pointed out, would have been promptly killed in the precolonial period. But with the changed times, especially with the uncomfortable proximity and vigilance of the missions, where they had stations, it had become customary to sell these children to the Aro, who in

turn disposed of them to the best advantage. According to George, most of the victims of the traffic at the time were supplied from this group of children. According to George,

in the opinion of the writer clear cases of child stealing are rare. That a child has been stolen or sold without the knowledge and consent of the parent or guardian and therefore technically stolen in the eyes of the law, is a frequent defence on the part of the parent or guardian concerned when questioned by the police and unless the child itself is traced it will be realised that this forms a very good line of defence hard to disprove.⁴⁹

Among those sold for the reason favored by S. P. George were children who had eaten or bitten a millipede, or licked excrement, or cut an upper tooth first, or who had been born bastards or twins or physically or mentally defective, or had committed incest, or failed to cry at birth, or had been born with one testicle (in the case of boys).⁵⁰ Even though the administration was inclined to overlook this contribution to the debate by George, we think he was right and those who disagreed with him were wrong. For instance, Udorie, the nine-year-old girl in the celebrated case that we discussed extensively in the preceding chapter, was actually put out for sale with the consent of her people. She had committed an abominable crime by sending a little boy to his death by pushing him into a pond or stream.⁵¹ We also think that George's findings applied not only to the Igbo but also to all of the peoples of the hinterland of the Bight of Biafra. Indeed, children who came into the categories listed above and were sold into slavery were the more humanely treated, for in some of the communities which were remote from missionary and administrative centers and headquarters, the old practice of immolation continued to operate in appropriate cases until about the early 1940s. In this matter, the *pax Britannica* brought the peoples of southeastern Nigeria face to face with a moral, cosmological, and ritual dilemma, which took them time to resolve. It is our view here that in seeking to explain why Igbo and Ibibio parents sold their children, one does not have to choose between the economic and cosmological imperatives. Both applied, depending on the particular circumstances of the case. On occasions both applied to the same case, where a poor family had a child whose birth broke a taboo or who in growing up broke a taboo.

In December 1935, that is, while the British investigations were going on, the matter of slave dealing was raised in the British Parliament by an MP, Mr. Ammon, who called on the secretary of state for the colonies to comment on the report that "child stealing and *slave raiding*" were still going on in Southern Nigeria. Responding, the secretary of state admitted there were reported cases of child stealing and slave dealing, which the police were investigating. He also drew attention to the fact that in 1932 the Nigerian Government had increased "the maximum punishment for child stealing and slave raiding from seven to fourteen years."⁵² He later went on to ask the

Nigerian Government to send him a more detailed report on the situation. This development showed that what was taking place in southeastern Nigeria had more than a local significance. Yet on the first of May 1936, the special police campaign was called off. “The information which has been obtained by the campaign,” wrote the chief secretary to the government,

will no doubt enable the Administrative Officers and the normal Police detachments in the areas affected to take the necessary action, and I am to request that instructions may be issued that the efforts to suppress the traffic of slave dealing and child stealing must not be relaxed.⁵³

In the letter conveying this order to discontinue the campaign, it was admitted that “there is still a section of opinion in England which will hardly be convinced of the justification for discontinuing this special campaign” and that the same comment applied to the League of Nations Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery, “to whom the campaign was described not pessimistically” in a memorandum of 18 January 1936.⁵⁴

The question that arises in the light of these admissions is why the campaign was called off before any conclusive results had been achieved. In all, there were four grounds, some of them mere excuses, for the action.

In the first place, the special campaign had been put together and launched because of the suspicion or belief which existed in government circles that the illegal traffic was the work of “organized gangs” or “centralized agencies” which offered the traders known and easy ways and means of disposing of their victims. Otherwise, it was thought, since the traffic was such a risky business, people would not go into it. This assumption offered the government the hope that by using police methods it could easily identify and locate those who ran these agencies and by means of exemplary punishment teach all concerned a lesson no one was likely to forget in a hurry. “Child stealers,” it was argued by one of the officers,

must be sure of a means of speedily disposing of their prey and this seems to indicate that there must be one or two central agencies, probably in the Bende Division: if the men responsible for organising the trade are caught and receive adequate sentences, the effect will be far greater than a number of convictions of underlings.⁵⁵

But these hopes appear to have been dashed quite early by the careful work of Major Garden, whose reports were described as discouraging “any theory to the effect that there exists any organized traffic . . . carried on by definite gangs of persons,”⁵⁶ much as it was widespread. This, of course, meant for the administration that the hope of creating a huge moral effect by smashing such gangs would not be realized. “The fact that it is so widely carried on by a few persons,” wrote Mr. E. A. Miller, the acting secretary for the Southern Provinces, “makes the task of detection considerably more difficult.”⁵⁷ Since

the special police campaign was a fire-brigade measure, it quickly became clear that this particular campaign was not a task for it.

What, indeed, did the administration mean by “organized gangs”? Did it go into the southeastern provinces expecting to find indigenous companies or business groups, approximating in organization to the United Africa Company or Miller Brothers Ltd., set up for the purpose of running the slave trade in the region? That would have been preposterous. In the same memorandum in which it was claimed Major Garden had found no organized gangs, it was reported that he

states that in nearly all the cases of slave dealing which came under his observation Aro men were involved, whilst in connection with the Idoma-Etchi-Aliki route from the Northern Provinces he mentions the headman of the Aro settlement of Etchi-Aliki whose name is said to be Ndi Ofo. Another Aro, Okoronkwo, the headman of the Ikwo area is also mentioned being a reputed agent.⁵⁸

Also, in a list of fifty-two prominent slave traders of this period, the following information was given about one Okuehe (Okwulehie?) of Amachara:

Stolen children are taken to Okuehe and he sends a boy, Obonna Izala, to Aro Chuku either by train as far as Aba or by bicycle to call Ngwu of Aro Chuku, Kalu of Aro Chuku and Lemadim of Aro Chuku. These three men are alleged to be well-known buyers of children. They go to Amachara and buy any children in possession of Okuehe and return by bush path through Uzuakoli, Bende and on to Aro Chuku. They also deal with an Amachara man named Ubendu and his brothers Owadelachi [Uwadelachi?] and Eromuanya [Iromuannya].⁵⁹

There was a chain or circle of dealers and suppliers around every other name mentioned in the list. We may also remember that one such chain handled the sale of Udorie. The business failed because the associates of the lynchpin, Okpani, could not link up with him. In a memorandum of 4 December 1933, the acting district officer for Okigwi, Mr. W. Leeming, had reported that there were gangs operating in the Ahoada and Degema areas. To prove his point he cited the case of some men who met in prison and decided to set up their own gang of slave dealers. Their first trip was made with one girl and two women but it ended in disaster because the gang did not first link up with local gangs interested in the business.⁶⁰ We can therefore understand why one of the assistants in the office of the secretary to the government minuted in the margin directly against the claim that there were no gangs:

I do not believe that no gangs exist. From experience of a large Aro community at Ndisuorgu in the Orlu District of Okigwi Division, I am convinced that slave dealing and child stealing organizations (“chains”) do exist among the Aros, and that further enquiries could fruitfully be pursued into their habits and customs, though probably an administrative officer would be more successful at it than a Police Officer.⁶¹

Yet it was on the supposed ground that there were no gangs that the commissioner of police based his insistence that the work in question did not require the deployment of a superior police officer and therefore asked that the police campaign be discontinued. Our view is that there were gangs after a fashion that matched the sociopolitical organization of the so-called acephalous communities of this zone, especially the Igbo, that is, chains or organizations with no easily visible structures or supporting columns or what have been called the bones of society.

The second reason for calling off the campaign was that the results achieved by it were seen as somewhat paltry. By the time the inspector-general of police called for the campaign to be stopped, a number of people accused of slave dealing and child stealing had been charged in the courts and sixty-seven convictions secured. On this outcome, the inspector-general commented, "These are the results of forty cases brought before the courts during a period of twenty-two months, and I do not look upon them as sufficiently encouraging to warrant a continuation of this special duty."⁶² In a more sensitive age and in different social circumstances, the number of convictions, which went along with the rescue of many of the victims, would have been viewed differently. While for a "civilized" society, the sale of one child in a year would have been considered one too many, for a "barbarous" society under colonial rule it is "understandable" that it might be viewed differently.

But the prosecution and sentencing of culprits was only one of the achievements of the special campaign. Equally important, if not more so, was the fact that it recovered many victims, most of whom were returned to their parents or guardians, while the few whose parents or guardians could not be traced were put in foster homes. Between Major Garden, Captain George, and Mr. Bell, at least twenty-seven children were recovered, that is, apart from those recovered following successful prosecutions. To give some idea of the extent of the recovery of children through prosecutions in the courts, it should be stated that thirty-five such prosecutions in 1933, on the eve of the special campaign, in the courts in Owerri, Okigwi, Bende, and Ahoada Divisions, which ended in the sentencing of seventeen men and the discharge of eighteen, involved a total of thirty-four children, all of whom regained their freedom.⁶³ In the year 1934, the special campaign started. In that year a total of fifteen persons were prosecuted, with thirteen being convicted and two discharged. The following year, eighty-one persons were prosecuted, of whom fifty-one were convicted and thirty discharged. Relative to the propaganda effect of these prosecutions, these statistics are perhaps misleading. On this the secretary to the Southern Provinces informed the governor that "The Resident of Owerri Province reported that these prosecutions which have been much discussed had had a salutary effect throughout the province. Not only did they have a deterrent effect on those engaged in the traffic but they led to people reporting the loss of children with less delay."⁶⁴ The special campaign gave the government the opportunity to raise the people's awareness of the fact that

the traffic was evil and that the government was determined to extirpate it. In the month of March 1934, that is, only three months into his assignment, Major Garden had seventy-six cases reported to him by parents who had lost their children during the quarter. Previously, many such parents did not report their losses.⁶⁵

The third reason for scrapping the campaign was shortage of staff. Staff shortage was the chronic ailment of the colonial administration in Nigeria, a condition that many students of the period have noted and that became worse in the Eastern Provinces with the introduction of direct taxation in 1928 and the endless spate of inquiries into the precolonial sociopolitical systems of the region followed by reorganizations. All this came after the Women's Riots of 1929–30. While transmitting to the governor Major Garden's last report, the acting secretary to the Southern Provinces wrote as follows: "I am to say that His Honour . . . regrets the necessity arising from shortage of staff, which has caused these investigations to be interrupted, and trusts that as soon as the position improves Major Garden or some other officer will be once more detailed for this very necessary work."⁶⁶ This was in June 1934. It took four months to find a replacement, in the person of Captain George. Writing in March 1936, the same office returned to the point: "In July [1935] shortage of staff again led to a suspension of the campaign until it could be resumed by Mr. Haydock-Wilson, Assistant Commissioner of Police, at the beginning of October." The chronic shortage of staff in the service affected the campaign adversely in other ways.

The administrative staff members who were expected to assist the police squad were themselves snowed under with work, which by itself explains why in the first place they suggested that the police should be called in to carry out a campaign which the administrative staff felt should be theirs and for which they considered themselves better suited. As Major Garden pointed out in one of his reports, "The local chiefs and others in the various districts I have visited are quite frank in stating that the increase in slave dealing and child stealing is partly due to the fact that District Officers are too busy handling tax collection and hearing cases to give the personal attention they used to give to the investigation of complaints."⁶⁷ When Captain George sought to get the help of these officers in respect of cases he had in hand, the difficulties created by this fact that the service was understaffed and thus overworked were again revealed:

I have now 12 cases on hand of which three are ready for depositions and in a fourth depositions have been taken but the chance of getting any more depositions taken for at least two months is remote and for that reason the position is most unsatisfactory. The District Officers Bende and Okigwi, who are the two concerned, are unanimous in saying that, much as they would like to, they are unable to give time to taking any more depositions for some time to come. The District Officer Okigwi mentioned two months and the District Officer Bende states that in view of the time

taken by the one case he did do, which was a simple one and had only nine witnesses for the prosecution and two accused as compared with one awaiting depositions with 14 witnesses for the prosecution and 5 accused, he does not see how it will be possible to do another at all while he has only one Assistant District Officer. I had thought of suggesting that I might be empowered to take them myself but there are certain obvious difficulties one being that I have no interpreter. The Assistant Judge is able to take these cases without depositions but I gather that he is not prepared to do this even if copies of the very full statements prepared by me are supplied to him. The position is therefore a virtual deadlock and I have had to refuse to accept any further cases unless accused are actually brought to me under arrest. . . . or until I can be sure when the cases already on hand are likely to be dealt with. These already involve 34 accused.⁶⁸

In addition to all this, Captain George found out he had too few police officers under him for the work and had to put in a request to the commissioner of police at Owerri for three more constables to help him look after the accused and carry out investigations. He also had to depend on the good offices of police detachments in the districts he visited to increase the strength of the squad under him.⁶⁹

The fact of the matter was that the government soon found out that in mounting the special campaign it had bitten off more than it could chew and so had to beat a dignified retreat. This, in our view, was perhaps the single most important reason for the ending of the campaign. The anti-slave trade campaign was a difficult task in societies like those found in southeastern Nigeria. The difficulty can perhaps be compared to the difficulty of conquering the region—a task that took some seventeen years or more to accomplish, while the conquest of Northern Nigeria with centralized states that commanded armies of cavalry had taken approximately five years. Operations like the anti-slave trade campaign in southeastern Nigeria are comparable to chasing the shadow of a bird in flight. The office of the lieutenant-governor, Southern Provinces, was of course quick to notice it and sound the alarm. When Major Garden drew attention to his belief that the traffic was being run by individuals rather than by organized gangs, the secretary to the Southern Provinces pointed out that “the fact that it is so widely carried on by individuals and not by organized gangs controlled by a few persons makes the task of detection more difficult.”⁷⁰ As we have attempted to show, there *were* gangs involved in the trade but not gangs with the kinds of institutional structures which the government could easily identify and deal with using police methods or any other known formal methods for that matter. But the difficulty arose not just from this organizational peculiarity of the societies and peoples of southeastern Nigeria (Margery Perham had compared engagement with them to fighting with the hydra). There were other difficulties as well.

The masterminds at the centre of the traffic were too mobile and too elusive. We have seen how mobile and elusive was Okpani, the Aro at the center of the bid to sell Udorie. In a similar manner, the attempt to track down

Ndiefo and Okoronkwo, the heads of the Aro settlements in Ezza and Ikwo (Abakaliki Division), respectively, yielded very little success. Major Garden confessed that it was very difficult to obtain their names. Each of them may well have had a different name by which he was known in each community in which he had business. Perhaps much more important was the difficulty which the government had in securing a conviction even where the criminals had been run to earth and charged. "It may be seen," observed Major Garden in January 1934, "that in a big percentage of cases the verdict was one of Not Guilty. This has been undoubtedly an incentive to parents, relatives and others to carry on the traffic. In Bende and Owerri Divisions alone fifty five persons stood their trial but only twenty three were convicted."⁷¹

The administration was no doubt hamstrung by its tendency to stick to the strict observance of the technicalities of the imported judicial system. But equally important in this regard was the attitude of the people themselves, which on occasions gave the impression that the colonial government was engaged in a crusade to save those who did not want to be saved. As Mr. Leeming, assistant district officer for Okigwi, observed, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that much of the old elaborate system for obtaining and selling slaves still existed or that this fact was known to the very people who were its victims, yet "attempts to elicit information about it are baulked by the lack of interest (and perhaps fear) of the people themselves."⁷² Why was this so? he asked. To this question he offered three answers which we consider cogent. The first was that because slave trading was a time-honored profession in these parts, no social stigma was attached to anyone for involvement in it, nor was any taint attached to any such trader caught and imprisoned by the colonial authorities, as imprisonment, an alien importation, was not regarded seriously. The second answer was that most people tended to take the offense of child stealing and slave dealing in this period lightly until their own children or relatives fell victim to its ravages. "Until a man is directly affected by the traffic," wrote Leeming, "through the removal of his own near kin, he takes very little interest in the dealings of other people." Therefore, he argued, "until a change of heart can be effected, and people made to realise the horrors of the traffic, no public assistance for its suppression can be expected to any great extent."⁷³ In this regard, one thing the government or people like Leeming did not know was that the people regarded assisting the police or the government in any campaign for the eradication of the evil with distaste because it was time-consuming and brought no recompense for the time wasted—what the people called the government's "come today, come tomorrow" approach. To protect themselves from such harassment, witnesses kept their distance from the police in particular and the government in general. Unfortunately, that is still the case today. What was more, some of those implicated in the slave trade were prominent and powerful individuals—some of them were in fact agents of the government, including warrant chiefs and their subalterns known as headmen. It was not only that some of these locally

powerful men, such as the warrant chiefs, had themselves been well-known slave dealers up to the advent of the colonial government and thus were likely to have continued to have residual sympathies for the trade and its practitioners. But some of them even continued in the business, in spite of the change in the circumstances and their personal conditions, until they were actually caught red-handed in the act and punished—some of them as late as the end of the 1920's.⁷⁴

Perhaps we should also mention that this reluctance or even refusal to inform against the slave dealers was one of the consequences of longstanding agreements and understandings between various communities and the leading traders, especially the Aro. On these agreements in the period before 1850 or so, David Northrup has written that “All the trading communities of the hinterland had some agreements or alliances with neighbouring communities to facilitate the movement of slaves and other goods into and out of their own trading area. The Aro appear to have a greater number of such ties than any other group. . . . These agreements were one of the important means by which the Aro or more accurately segments of the Aro, were able to expand their trade over so wide an area of the hinterland.”⁷⁵ But of course it was much more than that. When the trade came under attack under British rule, this system of agreements was one of the mechanisms called into action in its defense. And it functioned marvellously since, as we have shown elsewhere, it was the practice to clothe these agreements in the garb of kinship or blood descent,⁷⁶ which made informing against the Aro a species of crime against the ancestors and the gods. No one was going to lightly indulge in a crime with known serious consequences—certainly not just to please the intruding white man.

The third answer given by Leeming was apathy on the part of the victims themselves, that is, on the part of the slaves, even after they had been released from the jaws of their captors. In “regard to these horrors of the traffic,” Leeming argued,

I consider that our views are very much exaggerated. Returned slaves are usually very apathetic about their release, they very seldom, if ever, complain of any ill-treatment at the hands of their masters; they are usually poor people of little status in their town, and I am of opinion that after their release through Government intervention, they frequently drift back to their former masters.⁷⁷

This point about the victims and ex-victims of the slave trade being generally apathetic to the movement for the abolition of slave trading demands some explanation. The first factor was their age at the point of enslavement. The reports of this period put this at between five and ten years. This generally meant that by the time of their release they had forgotten where they came from and what their parents looked like. Those of them who were about ten or older and who remembered their homes were likely to harbor intense

hatred for their homes, especially if they had been sold by their parents or had slid from being pawns to being slaves because of the improvidence of their parents. The tendency for the victims to forget their homes was heightened by the intensity of reacculturation to which they were usually subjected in their new environments. Major Garden found out that in the Ogoja area and the other upper Cross River communities generally, after a child had been purchased he was “sent to live on a farm where it is taught the language of the district before being allowed to mix with other children. It is also given a new name and is treated like one of the family.”⁷⁸ Beyond that, when the slave owner died the slave inherited the property of the master, while the free-born children of the master returned to the families of their respective mothers. Captain George later discovered that the Aro and the people of Oguta both had places for the intense cultural immersion of newly bought slaves. For the Aro it was a place called Akpulawo, which was located in a remote part of the Aro Division, while for the Oguta it was a place called Ogaba, also located in a remote farming area. Aro villages in the Ibibio and upper Cross River areas were said to serve similar purposes. According to George, the children were kept at Akpulawo or similar locations “for a few years to be trained and [made] to forget their homes” before being taken to various Aro villages for appropriate deployment in their new status.⁷⁹

Perhaps one more explanation needs to be offered. This explanation, which today may be considered phoney because of our contemporary “scientific” mind set, lay in the superstitious world in which these events were taking place, and was perhaps the sovereign explanation for the paradoxical behavior of victims of the traffic. This explanation is that they had been put under a spell so that, as the Igbo would put it, they could no longer respond to situations with *anya oma*, that is, “good or normal eyes.” In other words, their personalities and mental conditions had been altered through the intervention of native doctors and their potions: the latter would have been introduced into their food or drinking water or administered directly under the false claim that they were remedies for ill-health or against witchcraft or “spirit” attack. The cultural immersion of the slaves involved not only the inculcation of the language and culture of their land of “new birth” but also rituals and ceremonies, which offered the opportunity for this mental and personality re-engineering. Evidence supporting this explanation abounds in surviving records and in oral tradition. Reporting on the Ekoï or Ejegham of the upper Cross River region, P. A. Talbot wrote as follows:

To guard against attempts to escape, on first arrival in the home of a new master, the latter usually cut off a lock of hair or some nail pairings, then took a piece of old cloth which the slave had worn. These were carried before the juju and a prayer offered that death or recapture might follow any attempt at escape. After the ceremony, the pieces were carefully kept in a secret place, and the slave believed that, should he run away, the juju would invariably “catch” him.⁸⁰

This practice was still in vogue in the Cross River region even as late as the 1940s. A concerned Ibibio man resident in the region and writing against this traffic in the year 1946 noted that “In most cases charms and spells are being used on them [the victims] so that within a short period they forget all about their native homes and parents.”⁸¹ Nor was the practice limited to the communities of the Cross River region. It was much more widely distributed. Miss Udorie, whose case we treated in detail in chapter 4, deposed before the trial judge that, at Uzuakoli, “The third accused told fourth accused to bring three eggs and these they broke and mixed with mud and smeared the mixture over my body.”⁸² Clearly this was meant to subdue her and change her identity and personality, for she had proved impossible to manage in the hands of her captors. But judging by subsequent events this does not appear to have worked. Such a wild cat was she!

In the light of all the factors discussed it is, therefore, not surprising that the government had a hard time of it getting the information it needed to successfully track down the slave dealers or to convict those who came before it accused of participation in the trade. Indeed, just as the special campaign was being launched, the “Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of Nigeria” lamented that “the matter is complicated by the fact that it is difficult to establish proof of parentage when children alleged to have been stolen were too young to remember their parents, while in other cases the so-called slaves do not desire to leave the custody of the persons with whom they are found and therefore render little help to the investigating officer.”⁸³ On the Cross River, Major Garden came face to face with such an obstinate refusal by a victim to leave the community in which he was a slave and return to his natal family. This was the case of a boy who had come to Ikom as a slave from Bamenda. When Major Garden saw him in the company of his second master, pulling a canoe loaded with yams for Calabar, he was ten years old. After listening to a pompous speech from Major Garden about “the King’s Highways being free” and about how he could assist the boy to trace his family, the boy “definitely refused, stating he would never leave a man who fed and clothed him well.” “Many such cases,” said Major Garden, “are to be found in Ikom Division.”⁸⁴

It was in the face of all these problems and frustrations that the government accepted the opinion of the inspector-general of police that “a special mission conducted by a superior police officer is unwarranted and that at least equally good results can be obtained by ordinary police methods carried out by the thirteen police detachments in these provinces if sufficient attention is given to this matter by the assistant police commissioners and district officers in charge of these detachments.”⁸⁵ It was also hoped that the native authorities could be motivated and mobilized to assist in the campaign. But these were vain hopes, for the problem of understaffing not only continued but soon worsened with the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. As for the native administrations in the southeastern provinces, these never found their

feet and were soon scrapped. During the period of the Second World War the administration returned to an important aspect of the informal campaign, that is, how to amend the existing ordinance in order to close the loophole which the recognition given to the traditional practice of child marriage gave to those who sold their daughters under the guise of giving them out in marriage. What was worse, the ordinance had also provided a loophole for anyone who kidnapped and sold a young girl. Such a person could claim and plead that he believed “in good faith” that he is indeed the father of the child in question or was entitled to her lawful custody and thus had only given her out in marriage! While the debate on how best to close this loophole was going on in 1942, it was claimed in official circles that “the actual stealing of children by agents who sell the children to others does not now exist to any great extent. At present the traffic appears to be confined to the so-called marriage transactions,” a practice that was said to be “particularly prevalent in Calabar Province.” But, as we mentioned above, the threat from kidnappers was still very real in the mid-1940s. Thus, this rather optimistic report was perhaps nothing more than an official delusion or even a carefully constructed excuse for doing nothing.

Meanwhile, evidence kept piling up from Calabar Province, revealing that for many slave traders it was business as before up to about 1950. In 1942, the district officer for Opobo Division reported a case in which a very young girl, Uwa Idiong, from Abak, was taken by three men to one Chief Abraham Nteuwija of Ngo, Andoni, by night “for marriage.” But Chief Abraham, instead of “marrying” the girl, detained her and the three men—Akpan Ebong, Mordecai Udo, and Silas Akpan—till the next day when he handed them over to the authorities. The acting Resident for Calabar Province commented: “There is no doubt whatever that there is a considerable traffic in small girls under the cloak of marriage between the Abak Division and Andoni in Opobo Division and also to Opobo town,” thereby contradicting his predecessor who had asserted that the people of Calabar Province did not sell their children.⁸⁶ Four years later, in November 1946, the Ibibio Union added its voice to the outcry against the trade in Ibibio children when it forwarded to the government a petition and an appeal written to it by a concerned Ibibio man living in Ogoja Province. Claiming that he witnessed daily many “Ibibio children being kidnapped and sold into slavery here [at Ogoja] by those who posed as traders in various Ibibio districts,” the petitioner deposed that

Presently there is not a village in the Cross River where one would not find young children of Ibibio parentage, suffering in the hands of their masters and mistresses. In certain cases these masters and mistresses claim to have married these children or employed them for domestic labours. But judging from the tender age of these children, it is hard to believe such statements.

Vigorous Police investigations have shown that these children have in most cases been kidnapped and stolen and eventually sold into slavery. The children being too

young cannot give correct accounts of themselves and their parents when questioned by the Police. In most cases charms and spells are being used on them so that within a short time they forget all about their native homes and parents. The result is that when such is the case the D.O. Obubra, simply hands them over to their slave masters and mistresses.

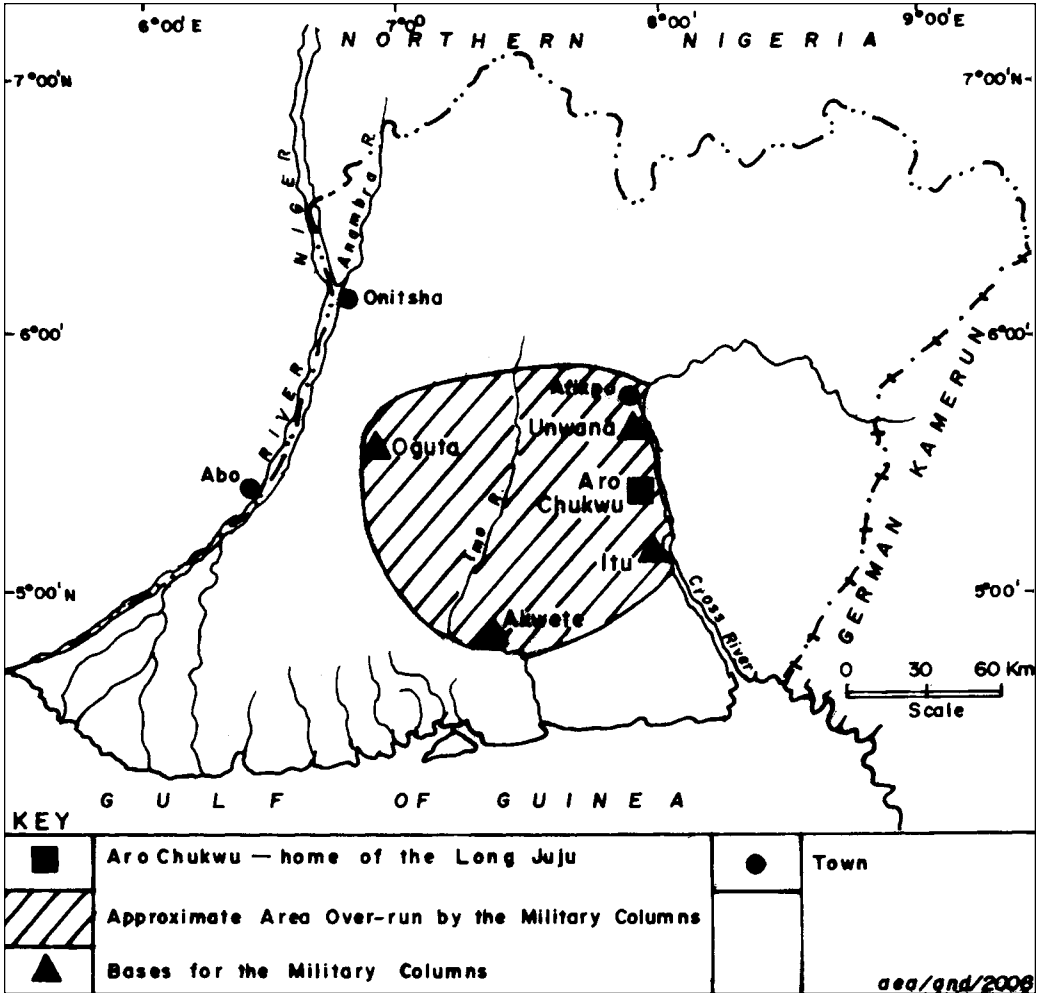
This practice goes on days in days out until their masters and mistresses begin to boast that Ibibio children are the only marketable stock they could have. Today (7.10.46), there is a case of one Okon Bassey of Ekuri, barely 15 miles from here, being found in possession of two Ibibio girls from Nung Ukim clan, Ikot Ekpene. On inquiry, he Okon Bassey maintained that he had married these children lawfully from their parents, but the children are of such tender age and of one mother also. How one mother can give up her two children to one man in marriage is questionable.⁸⁷

In November 1947 another petition was sent to the Resident, Calabar, from one Joseph Okon of Obubra Police Station on the same issue. According to him, 25 percent of the population of the Cross River area was made up of slaves from the Ibibio nation and the culprits, whom he described as “knaves,” were so-called traders from Ibibio, Obubra, Afikpo, Ikom, and Aro Chukwu. The victims were children between the ages of one and eighteen. There were also, he said, cases of widows sold with their children. In many such cases, he said, the well-known marriage ceremonies are performed for the victims in their home to deceive neighbors, but when these poor wretches got into the Cross River region, they were made to go through all the established “slavery ceremonies.” After this they were treated as slaves and not as wives. “I wish to suggest to His Worship [the Resident],” he went on, “that a person from Cross River i.e. Obubra, Afikpo and Ikom should not be allowed to marry in [i.e., from] the Calabar Province”! That showed how desperate he was.⁸⁸

At the time, this growing number of protests from the rising educated elite of the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland do not appear to have had any visible impact on the colonial administration. The present author has seen no surviving evidence of an attempt on its part to follow up these disquieting revelations in the normal way. The comments of the Residents and the divisional officers on the petitions were rather languid and lacking in interest. The point was that just as the tone and temper of Nigerian politics changed with the end of the Second World War, so did the focus and concern of the administration. As it became clearer that its days were numbered, the administration came to give more attention to policy issues and actions, which it considered as more likely to boost its image as being development-oriented. An apparently overworked issue such as the slave trade did not fall into this category. Consequently, the administration lost interest in playing up actions and happenings in that field. A close look at the annual reports of the Afikpo Division for the years 1942 to 1950, for instance, shows that not once did issues related to the slave trade and slavery make it into these important documents in which the administration was wont to advertise what it was doing and achieving.

Instead, these reports were dominated by issues in the domains of rural development, local administration, and the agitation, disquieting to the administration, by the nationalists for more and more political space. Of the slave trade and the campaign to abolish it, the administration was apparently sick and tired.

In this connection, it is not insignificant that it was an Eastern House of Assembly, made up of these nationalist politicians, who attempted, in this area, to do what Napoleon could not do—pass a law which sought to abolish the *osu* caste system among the Igbo. *Osu* was an obnoxious institution, which everyone had inveighed against from the onset of colonial rule but about which no one had actually done anything. We are thus unable to say here, or anywhere else for that matter, when indeed the internal slave trade, the age-old scourge of the region, came to an end—if indeed it has come to an end. As I write these sentences, Owerri, the capital of Imo State, is being mentioned in whispers as going through yet another period of child thefts and kidnappings only slightly less flagrant than those that helped to spark the devastating Otokoto Riots of 1996. I was informed early in November 2004 that in the course of that year alone, fifteen cases of kidnappings and child thefts had made it into the public domain. Here there was a dark suggestion that many more cases had escaped the notice of the law enforcement agencies thanks to the fact, it was claimed, that many of the kingpins amongst the culprits were, to use a local Nigerian expression, “men of calibre and timber”—that is, men who occupied commanding positions in the public and private sectors of society.



Map 4. South Eastern Nigeria showing major places mentioned in the text. © Ambrose Dibia of the Department of Geography, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Our subject, the history of the campaign to end the slave trade in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland, or southeastern Nigeria, which should be a logical follow-up to the history of the campaign against the same evil in the Atlantic, has been neglected by the many scholars who have made the history of the region their special interest. Perhaps part of the explanation for this situation lies in the poor documentation of the design, methods, and progress of the campaign in the official records, especially for the early part of the period. This poor documentation arose from the fact that by the time the Atlantic phase of the campaign had ended, the focus of British policy in the region, which was never completely altruistic, had shifted more or less totally from philanthropy and humanitarianism to unalloyed commercialism and imperialism. With this shift of focus, the official British attitude to the affairs of the Bight and its hinterland was shaped in part by the assumption and belief, arising from what was seen and heard of social conditions in the Bight, that the slave trade and slavery in the region were not in fact notorious social scandals but at worst some kind of benign social tumors, and that they did not demand emergency surgery.

In consequence, nothing radical or spectacular was done to root out these evils in the course of the last four decades of the nineteenth century. However, in that period, steps were taken to create a protectorate administration or regime and to strengthen and expand legitimate trade in the natural produce of the land, in the belief that any success achieved in these two fields would have spin-off effects. One of these effects was expected to be the death of the slave trade, of slavery, and of other associated barbarous practices. In other words, in the course of the campaign the slave trade had come to be seen as just one other antiquated socioeconomic practice that the people had to be made to discard in order to straighten the highway of legitimate trade and to rechannel local productive energies to achieve what were now perceived as more beneficial ends.

For the greater part of the period (ca. 1885–ca. 1950) that the campaign was being waged, its dominant tone and temper may be said to be captured by the phrases *festina lente* and *quieta non movere*, that is to say, the movement was a languid and leisurely undertaking. It was only perhaps in the period

ca. 1897–1927, when the region was being crisscrossed by military expeditions, columns, and patrols, that there appeared to be some deviation from the policy of *festina lente*. For the rest of the period, the campaign was left to the courts and the regular police, which bore it along with their other heavy duties.

We detect four phases or periods in the overall history of the campaign. The first phase, which lasted from 1849 to 1885 and falls outside the period covered in this work, saw an effort to redirect the attention of the so-called “old coasters” of the Bight and their African counterparts from the shipping of African slaves abroad to the shipping of such natural produce as palm oil, palm kernels, and ivory. The second period ran from ca. 1885 to ca. 1900 and saw an attempt to build up the forces with which to assault the “darkness” of the interior, overcome it, and install a new political and economic order. This effort took two forms—the establishment of administrative structures appropriate to the needs of the system of colonial rule known as a “protectorate” and the building-up of a working relationship with the local coastal middlemen aimed at promoting the new commerce in the hinterland. The third period (1900–27) saw the use of the iron fist of the army to break up all resistance to the new order in the interior. In this effort, slave traders and slave trading institutions and centers were singled out for special attention. This went on until 1926–27 when the last patrol against slave dealers and slave-keepers visited the Nkanu area of Enugu. Going on more or less simultaneously with this phase or period was the fourth phase, which saw the installation in the hinterland of the new administrative and economic order that had been elaborated along the coast in the nineteenth century. The objective was to create an environment that would promote legitimate trade while also causing the old one to wither and die. With the onset of this phase, which may be said to have lasted till the end of colonial rule, the campaign became the affair of the courts and constables. By and large, the success attained in the whole effort was not measured directly in terms of the number of slaves freed or the number of slave traders dislodged but indirectly in terms of the growth registered by the new trade. The assumption was that the old trade and the new were so incompatible that the growth of the one (the new trade) necessarily implied the decline of the other (the slave trade). Indeed, each new road, each newly established administrative or district headquarters, native court center, mission station or school, or commercial trading depot (called “Beach” in this period even if located miles away from the bank of the nearest stream or river) was seen as a severe blow against the slave trade and related obnoxious practices.

Three main methods were employed in the campaign. The first was war or what Bismarck, the German chancellor, would have called the method of blood and iron. This was in use from the beginning, or indeed was a carryover from the Atlantic phase of the campaign that ended about 1860. It remained in use until about the end of the third decade of the following century. The

second method involved the use of what we have dubbed “courts and constables,” and called for the enactment of legislation that made the slave trade and related activity criminal, thus creating an environment that made it possible for the police to arrest and prosecute in the British courts those caught in the act. Those found guilty were sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment and/or a fine. The third method was indirect—the creation of economic and social conditions which would attract those open to change away from the accursed trade. However, there is very little about this third method in the present work, for there is nothing in the records to show what it achieved, if anything. Its results were apparently not easily measurable.

There were four storm centers in the campaign. The first two were the Niger Delta area to the south, and then the Ogoja and the upper Cross River area to the northeast, which could be described as bottomless pits insofar as their capacity for absorbing slaves was all but limitless. Then there were the Bende and Afikpo Divisions in Owerri and Ogoja Provinces, respectively, which had the biggest and most notorious regional fairs for the sale and distribution of slaves. Leading the parade of slave traders were the Aro, the Awka, the Mgbowo, and the Nkwerre, who acquired their human goods not only from within the region but also from the Northern Provinces, especially from the Igala and the Idoma, and from the Cameroon grasslands.

As the campaign began hitting home, it was the children who became most imperiled, especially female children, who could easily be sold, and were actually sold, in significant numbers, under the cover of marriage or of providing household help. Throughout the period there were two main methods by which the unfortunate human goods were obtained—kidnapping and the willing cooperation of impoverished parents in urgent need of money or saddled with children supposedly rejected by the gods of the community, by the ancestors, and by the community itself. Recruitment by means of oracles, especially through the notorious Ibini Ukpabi of the Aro, made its own contribution but perhaps by the end of the second decade of British presence in the interior this source had dried up or, at best, survived in a very attenuated form. The callous treatment of helpless children as chattels ranks high as an explanatory factor for the fact that the iniquitous trade proved so difficult to suppress and may be said to survive till today in very elusive forms.

But there were other contributory factors. The colonial administration found itself handicapped by severe shortages in men and materials and thus was never able to execute even one sustained, extensive hunt for the culprits. Even though the sources for these hapless children and their destinations were known from very early on in British rule, no action was ever taken to sanitize the Delta region and the Cross River area, for instance. Each remained till the end a byword for dark and unknowable territory, either because of its geography and ecology or because of its legendary reputation for barbarism and cultural peculiarity, or because of its distance from the palm belt, which constituted the focus of British transformational economic, social, and political

activity during the period. But above all the Aro, the undisputed villains in the saga, were very resourceful in the use of such long-standing institutions and centers of the trade as the oracles, their widely dispersed settlements, and the regional fairs at centers such as Uzuakoli and Uburu. They were also dogged and prepared to absorb everything the British threw at them as deterrents in this matter—war, the police, prosecution in the courts with heavy sentences in the event of conviction, sustained adverse propaganda and vilification, and so on. An example of this doggedness even at the individual level can be given. Writing on the subject in 1931, Mr. G. E. Murphy, district officer on special duty, had the following to say:

The Aros are well known as the most important slave dealers. In the course of this tour I have had before me 16 men charged with slave dealing and child stealing of which number 9 were Aros. The buyers were invariably Aros. The fact that several of these men had been previously convicted of slave dealing goes to show that the present scale of punishments is insufficient to act as a deterrent. Only the other day (in case R.31/1931) I convicted an Aro of slave-dealing and sentenced [him] to consecutive sentences of four and two years. When I tried this case the other day, it transpired that he had been brought in custody from Ikot Ekpena Prison where he was under arrest on *another* charge of slave-dealing.¹

In attempting to account for the rise in the export of slaves from the Bight of Biafra across the Atlantic in the period after the seventeenth century, Philip Curtin drew attention to the role of the coastal states on the one hand and of the Aro through their Long Juju on the other.² Our study shows that these groups remained important in the history of the internal slave trade, which had been an essential part of the Atlantic slave trade till its very end.

Another reason why the internal trade lasted so long was the unwillingness of the people to inform against slave dealers generally and against the Aro specifically. This was the standard explanation the administration resorted to in accounting for the fact that many accused persons walked out of the courts as free men for want of evidence. "Something might be done," suggested Mr. Murphy, at the time district officer for Itu,

to put pressure on the chiefs and people to impel them to disclose slave-dealing cases as the arrival of a new slave child must be patent to the community. The natives are unable to conjure up any righteous indignation on the subject of slave dealing. They, indeed, regard such transactions with indifference—unless the stolen child is one of their own.³

But nothing could be done to break this apparent conspiracy of silence.

Then there was what, from the second decade of British rule in the hinterland, the administration came to regard as the inadequacy of the punishment provided for the crime in law. This was a maximum of seven years penal servitude or a fine or both. But the maximum punishment was not imposed in all

cases where a conviction was secured. Some cases were seen as revealing extenuating circumstances and thus convicted persons were seen as deserving reduced sentences. Yet most officers cried out for the punishment to be raised. Indeed, they blamed the failure to impose harsher punishment for the continuance of the crime and even for the rise in its incidence. In 1931, Murphy pointed out the absurdity of the fact that this crime against the human person was being more leniently treated than the willful destruction of farm produce. "It seems scarcely fitting," he said, "that certain offences against property should be held in law to be of equal gravity with offences against personal liberty; e.g. under the Criminal Code a mere attempt to set fire to a few mouldy yams on a stack is punishable with seven years imprisonment, and for the completion of the offence fourteen years could be given."⁴ Yet, he pointed out, this was not a common crime, since the humid nature of the environment made it difficult to accomplish. Not long after this, the law was amended to make it possible for convicted slave dealers and child kidnappers to receive a maximum sentence of fourteen years imprisonment.

However, the fact that the sentence prescribed in the law was apparently not heavy enough to deter would-be offenders was only part of the story. The other part was that imprisonment did not carry any moral slur in the eyes of the people. In fact, in places ex-convicts gained the reputation of "modern toughs" and thus gained extra respect. Some of them came to be known as experts in relations and dealings with the colonial establishment and thus were able on occasion to make money as consultants of sorts. Furthermore, the courts, especially with respect to their processes and proceedings, were slow, protracted, and too technical. In addition, the law itself had too many loopholes, which hardened experts in the criminal business could exploit. Also the colonial constables or police were tainted with veniality, which many a time made it difficult to find the right man at the appropriate level for the job. At times this compelled the use of white officers, a development the police did not always like, as it nearly always meant using superior officers for jobs ordinarily below their rank.

By about the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, the force of military campaigns in the movement for abolition was spent. By the 1930s, the method that made use of "courts and constables" had nothing new to offer in the campaign. It was after this time that the impact of the other aspects of the great universal solvent—the *pax Britannica*—started being felt more strongly. Here we have in mind the new roads, the urban centers, the schools, the Christian churches, the expatriate commercial houses, increased coming and going, and the like. The importance of these in the context of our study lay in the fact that their overall influence took the form of the spread of that general civilization and enlightenment which ultimately was responsible for weaning the general population from the slave trade and from many other barbarous practices with which it was associated. Because this factor operated quietly and without fanfare, its impact could not be monitored

in measurable terms. As a result we are not able to say with certainty when the last slave was sold and bought, and where this took place—precisely the kind of information we need in order to be in a position to date the termination of that centuries-old wrong against the human person in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland.

In sum, it can be said that the campaign against the slave trade would appear not to have been designed to sweep through all the nooks and corners of our area to ferret out slave dealers and the institutions and agencies they used in their nefarious business for destruction, once and for all. Rather it depended mainly on the effects of deterrence, that is, on dealing with those traders and their agencies and institutions that in their activities actually stumbled against the law and its agencies. The hope was that the fate suffered by these “unfortunates” would discourage others. Those traders and their agencies that were able to keep successfully underground escaped punishment and harassment, and the fact that they existed never worried the conscience of the colonial administration. Perhaps when we talk of the ending of the slave trade in this region, we mean only, strictly speaking, the end of the era during which the colonial apparatus of power was interested enough and in a strong enough position to detect some of these activities and punish them. This must not be taken as the same thing as the onset of a period when these activities no longer took place at all, whether openly or clandestinely.

Our study certainly confirms that the Aro occupied the commanding heights in respect of the movement of “unfree” persons up and down the region. However, it would appear that their command of the heights was far from total. Apparently they commanded only a segment of the trade—such as the movement of victims to the principal slave markets of the hinterland and to the ultimate consumers in the Niger Delta and the communities of the Upper Cross River. But outside these areas—in the collection of slaves from the principal suppliers, such as impoverished parents, kidnappers, and so on—there was a wide range of other participants from all over the region. Thus, if the Aro were in charge of anything here it was the upper segments of the pyramid. For instance, an Uzuakoli informant mentioned that only the Aro moved slaves into Aro Chukwu and out of it.⁵ For most people in the business, Aro Chukwu was just a distant name, a mysterious city which only few visited in order to have perilous dealings with Chukwu Ibini Ukpabi. However, the base of the pyramid was for the most part in the hands of other persons, some of them small-time dealers, some of them established and hardened dealers.

It is also clear that the Aro created neither the demand nor the supply. They were mainly agents of transportation and transmission, from which they reaped large dividends in material wealth, reputation, and influence. The demand, which was located mainly in the Niger Delta and the upper Cross River, arose from demographic and sociocultural factors indigenous to the societies of those areas. Likewise, the demand for victims needed for funerals

and dedication to local deities, a demand that was very widely dispersed in the region, was not created by the Aro but was a consequence of ritual, religious, and cosmological ideas intrinsic to the societies of the region. The same was true of the supply. This arose from demographic, social, ritual, and cosmological beliefs and practices and pressures inherent in the societies of the region. These were not the creation of the Aro. The Aro also had no say in how the victims were used after purchase—that is, in the management of the local institutions of slavery. Local and individual initiatives, proclivities, and perversions determined whether the victims were deployed as farm hands, domestics, or victims of sacrifice; and for those who did not lose their lives, local factors determined how they were managed or treated from day to day.

In the segment they controlled, the Aro had institutions, systems, and practices that made them effective. These included the oracle, widely dispersed markets and fairs, the equally widely dispersed settlements of the Aro, blood covenants, and, while it lasted, their symbiotic relationship with the famed headhunters of Igboland. The strength of this system of control came out eloquently in the refusal of communities to inform against slave traders, the slave trade, and the Aro.

The limits of Aro economic power in the region are also revealed by the fact that the Aro did not enter into the control and management of the agricultural and manufacturing life of the communities, nor into the control of the movement of goods and services not connected with the slave trade. Thus, while Aro economic power in the Bight and its hinterland in the nineteenth century and in the first three or four decades of the twentieth century was quite strong, it did not amount to a monopoly or to what Dike called “economic dictatorship.”⁶ One hopes that with more evidence from all the relevant periods, it should be possible to extrapolate these findings to earlier centuries, in a bid to understand the structure and dynamics of the economic life of the zone generally and of the slave trade in particular.

In spite of a determination from the very conception and design of the research for this work to answer the question “What, economically and socially, became of the slave traders after they had been made to abandon the accursed business?” very little progress was made in this direction. First, there was very little information in the official records with which to grapple with the question. Second, recourse to oral tradition yielded few details or insights. Some informants had no relevant information whatever to give, suggesting a kind of deliberately cultivated historical amnesia. This was especially the case with those of them whose fathers or uncles were directly involved in the trade and who today regard such involvement as dishonorable, and indeed “sinful,” from their modern standpoint as “Christians” and “civilized” men. One elder summarized the situation by referring the author to the Igbo fable about the bush fowl.⁷ In the story, the bush fowl was advised by a wise elder not to feed only on yams while the farmer’s yams were in the farm, but to feed also on wild roots so that it would not starve to death when the farmer dug up his

yams and carried them home. For then it would be able to survive on wild roots only until the next yam season. In apparent obedience to the moral of this fable, no slave dealer, not even such notorious dealers as the Aro, Awka, and Nkwerre, pursued the slave trade as their only business.

Not only did this diversification provide some cover for the illicit trade, but it also ensured that when it became impossible to continue with it, the former slave dealer would have little difficulty remaining in business as a trader or meeting his responsibilities as a householder. Some pursued these other lines themselves. Some had apprentices and retainers who pursued the other lines for them. Some were in the palm oil and palm kernel trade. Some traded in tobacco and natron, camwood and related traditional beautification agents, ironmongery, and so on. This was in addition to some degree of involvement in agriculture or in such crafts as smithing and the weaving of raffia bags, pandamus mats, and ropes for stringing up yams in the barn and for tethering animals. My uncle, who was the central figure in the celebrated case of the nine-year-old girl, Udorie, after his seven years imprisonment remained a long distance trader till old age—trading in fowls, pigs, and goats, a line of business that predated his imprisonment for slave dealing. Sometimes he was away from home for three months without a break, moving these items from one market to another. On one occasion, his family became panic-stricken, thinking he had fallen victim to headhunters because he remained on his circuit for over four months without sending home any messages about his wanderings. Some young men had to be mobilized to track him down and drag him home. After two weeks on the assignment, the search party returned empty-handed. When asked to report on their assignment they asked: “How do you track the swallow [*oheke*] once it sets out on its seasonal migration?”

In other words, the so-called slave dealers of southeastern Nigeria were more than slave dealers. They were versatile businessmen, each of whom had a foot in the two business camps of the day—the camp of so-called legitimate trade and the camp of so-called illicit trade. When the heat in the camp of illicit trade became unbearable, or when that line became no longer profitable, each one who was adversely affected simply withdrew his foot and replanted it in the camp of so-called legitimate trade. Thus the act and process of adjustment to the abolition of the slave trade were nothing sudden, traumatic, or even dramatic. This was all the more so as no social stigma attached itself to anyone for participating in the trade or for having been jailed for such participation. Indeed, participation in the slave trade was one of the exploits one could mention in answering to one’s drum name on appropriate occasions, especially where these exploits involved the sale of adults or the snatching of a child from an adult and selling it into slavery. This was just as one could mention exploits in the other professions, in wrestling, in war, or in overpowering dangerous animals such as the lion, the tiger, the wild boar, or the buffalo. There was, therefore, no crisis of social acceptance or revalidation. Today no obvious telltale social odor hangs around the

descendants of notorious slave dealers of the bad past. That is to say, no one holds their past in this regard against them as far as social intercourse is concerned. But, of course, whenever a tragedy strikes such a family, dark mummings are heard about the debts they have to pay in return for the innocent lives and fortunes they truncated in the course of the slave trade. But there is nothing special about this in the culture in question, for on other occasions such personal and/or family tragedies are explained by reference to serious infractions in the past by such persons or families of some other time-honored taboos having nothing whatever to do with the slave trade. Thus, participation in the slave trade was not necessarily, in the code of these communities, a crime of unmatched heinousness. Among other things, it was certainly regarded as a brave deed.⁸

By the late 1930s or so, most of the victims of the slave trade in southeastern Nigeria were women and children. The victims were for the most part converted into wives if they were female or adopted as children by their purchasers especially among the Ijo of the Niger Delta and the Benue-Congo-speaking peoples of the upper Cross River region. This raises the question whether persons bought and then adopted as children or married as wives are indeed slaves and whether the traffic at this late stage was still a slave trade. There may be authorities who are inclined to think it would be inaccurate to refer to such persons as slaves and the transaction that brought them to where they found themselves as an example of the slave trade. This is especially so as such authorities compare the condition of slaves in the Biafran hinterland to that of the chattel slaves usually associated with Western European and New World slavery.

But we think that to correctly assess the condition of such persons one should compare their lot and status not with what obtained in other cultures of which they knew nothing and for which they cared nothing. The assessment should be with their lot *vis-à-vis* those who lived in the same culture as themselves and with whose lot they compared their own when they found themselves inclined to make comparisons.

In the first place, they had been sold and bought, which meant that even when freed or converted into children or wives they became at best ex- or former slaves, a description which could be applied to them by adversaries or vengeful spirits. Those who found themselves “free” following the advent of the British faced this situation if they returned to the communities of their birth. If they stayed in the communities that bought them, they remained *ndi obia* (“strangers”) rather than free born. There was no escape from this dilemma except permanent immigration to an urban area, which indeed is no real escape for one looking for the status of a free person. The seriousness of this dilemma is obvious in the fact that even among the Ijo, who took clear steps to make their slaves Ijo, culturally speaking, it was found necessary to pass draconian laws against any attempt to remind any product of that process of the fact that he came into the community a slave—which meant that such reminders were not only possible but actually took place.

In the second place, a free person in these cultures is one who is securely tethered to his father's and mother's lineages, psychologically, economically, politically, and socially, and can thus, as the need arises, call for help from both lineages as well as move freely from the one to the other, whether in times of "feast" or in times of "famine." But such secure anchorage is denied to the adopted child slave and to the female slave converted to a wife. Rosemary Harris has shown that among the peoples of the upper Cross River, double lineage anchorage is not a theoretical but a practical advantage of deadly seriousness. Of the Ikom area she writes that

throughout the area . . . the kin system stressed the formal attachment of each individual both to his father's and mother's kin. The combination of matrilineal authority with patrilineal residence meant in effect that the agreement of both parties would have to be obtained for the sale of kinsmen. How hard this would be is shown by the fact that although pledging for debt was a well recognized practice . . . a man if he had no slave to pledge, had to pledge himself. He could not pledge his son because the boy's mother's brother would not allow it; and he could not pledge his sister's son as the father would not consent.⁹

Among the Igbo, if a woman objected to the sale or pledging of her child by her husband or by her husband's people, she could easily mobilize support from among her people to stop it, except where the child fell into the category of persons rejected by the gods, by the ancestors, and by the community. Also, if the woman was married from a distant community, it would be impossible for her to sneak out quietly to alert and mobilize her people on such an occasion. To attempt to do so in those dark days would expose her to the serious risk of falling into the hands of kidnappers and thus ending up in slavery herself or as an object to be dedicated to a local god, to be used in burying the dead or for a cannibal feast. This was one of the situations families in this region had in mind in insisting that their beloved daughters married close to home as far as possible.

In the third place, the Igbo say the road that connects in-laws is like the road to the stream from which a community draws its drinking water. It is never overgrown with bush because of the tramping of feet as people use it to go and come. There is no such road linking the community of birth of a slave girl or woman converted to a wife and the community in which she is a wife. The Igbo go further and say the road leading from the latter's community of birth to the community in which she is married is like the road a man uses to go and fetch firewood. It is never used more than once and thus is quickly overgrown with bush and brambles. Neither does the woman look back to her place of birth, which treated her so abominably, nor does her husband, whose interest it is that she never looks back, encourage her to do so. Any such looking back would be a serious embarrassment for the two communities. Indeed, it is known that ritual and occult steps were usually taken to prevent such

looking back. Thus the “slave” son, “slave” daughter, and “slave” wife were in law and ritual in no position to enjoy the same status as their counterparts who had never been through the dehumanizing process of being sold and bought.

As already mentioned, by the late 1930s two main push factors acted on those parents who sold their children. To recapitulate, these were, first, economic hardship or the difficulty of feeding and bringing up what were considered surplus children; and, second, the need to be rid of children whose birth broke one taboo or another or who in growing up broke a taboo by their conduct. One or two questions arise in respect of these factors and their operation in the societies in question.

In respect of the force of economic hardship, one question is why the Igbo communities in which, for the most part, this force operated did not move to the northeastern frontiers of Igboland where the population was less dense and where, therefore, more land for profitable agriculture existed. In reacting to this question, we should note that the communities in question were located for the most part in the Okigwe and Orlu areas or the so-called Igbo heartland. From here, mass movement to the Cross River region would have been a tall order considering the distance involved and the fragmented nature of Igbo sociopolitical organization—assuming that it was generally known in these regions that open land was beckoning from the upper Cross River. And in any case, open land did not mean land without owners, as the experience of Izzi and Ikwo expansion in the Cross River region amply demonstrates. Furthermore, such migration was possible only before the advent of the British. With the coming of the British, an effort was made to keep communities within the territories they were found to be occupying by the colonial master at the time of his advent. This was part of the reason for the anger of the Abakaliki Igbo against the British. For the period before the coming of the British, it is to be assumed that the force of this pressure never came to the level of that which led to the Zulu and the other Bantu *mfekane* of the nineteenth century—the only level at which it would have been able to transform the pre-existing Igbo socio-political organization and raise the required warlike leaders who would champion such a major population movement. Before that level could be reached, unfortunately, the slave trade (internal and external) came as an easier answer to the situation.

A second, and maybe subsidiary, question which has been raised is why the extended family failed to cushion the impact of economic hardship and thus save thousands of children from the ordeal of the slave trade. The extended family probably did play such a cushioning role, but that would have been only up to a point. The fertility beliefs and practices and the factor of dense populations on territory with poor soil that were the causes of this economic hardship would have operated over the entire ecological niche occupied by cultural subgroups such as the Isu of Orlu and the Obowo of Okigwe, leaving every section of an extended family more or less at the same level of economic capacity, or more correctly economic incapacity.

In respect of children whose birth broke primordial taboos or who broke such taboos in the process of growing up, the question is how the families and communities afflicted with such children dealt with their cases before the onset of the Atlantic slave trade. The surviving folklore and traditions of the societies covered in this study provide a summary answer to this question: they were done away with. But the process of “doing away with” differed according to whether the child was one whose birth broke a taboo or one who broke a taboo in the process of growing up. If the former, the child was simply put into a large earthen pot with a wide mouth, which was then taken to the bad bush and abandoned there. As the child had not yet gone through any of the rituals and traditional ceremonies that would make it a full member of the community, it was treated as a perfect stranger with no name and no relations. Its destruction would evoke few emotions and twinges of conscience. As the Igbo people, for instance, would normally say: “it does not know us and we do not know it.”

But if the child belonged to the second category, that is, broke a taboo or taboos while growing up, the matter became more complicated—complicated by the fact that the child would already have a name and would have gone through many rituals and ceremonies which helped to induct it into the community. The community “would therefore already have known it and it would have known the community.” The summary destruction of such a child could hardly be on the cards, because of the taboo against the shedding of the blood of kinsmen. Two options, I was told, were open for dealing with such a child. One was to take it to a road junction distant from the clan and abandon it there in the hope that some family from outside the clan would pick it up and rear it. I was told of some present-day prominent persons who had been so treated under the British as the process of sale became increasingly difficult following the campaign against the slave trade. In these later cases, the victims were picked up by the missions and brought up by them. The other option was to go into some arrangement with a community from outside the clan and fob the child off on them with cock-and-bull stories on the need for the transaction—perhaps with and perhaps without a consideration. Speculating on the “pre-Atlantic” origin of the internal slave trade in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland, A. J. H. Latham attributed it to the need to dispose of prisoners of war who could not all be eaten.¹⁰ We are inclined to suggest here that disposing of the victims of these primordial taboos may have been the *fons et origo* of the human traffic in these lands. The kinds of wars which the communities in this zone fought would rarely have reached such an intensity as to lead to the taking of prisoners on a scale that would have created the kind of “consumption” crisis that was implied by Latham and that would have generated the sale of extras, thus leading to the origin of the slave trade.¹¹

Without doubt, the slave trade was one of the pillars of the precolonial economic and social systems of the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland. The fact that it took so long to abolish the trade tells us something of the strength of

those systems and of their resilience in the face of the many-sided onslaught against them under colonial rule. The fizzling out of the trade in the late 1940s or early 1950s did not mean the collapse of the systems that had in part rested on it. On the contrary, the precolonial economic and social institutions and relationships continued to operate, even if in attenuated forms. Indeed, it may be suggested that the difficulty which the colonial rulers and their successors have had in revolutionizing the economic and social relationships attendant on the trade may be explained in part by reference to their failure to find an adequate replacement for the slave trade as a source of labor (social energy), as a means of transportation effectively linking every tiny community in the region, and as a form of wealth and social prestige. Today the societies concerned are reeling under the weight of various forms of social malaise arising from the activities of indigenous “bad guys.” This suggests that the modern forms of punishment, chastisement, and correction for socially disruptive behavior have proved themselves not quite a match for the slave trade as a means of ridding society of social misfits and all others prone to disruptive behavior. These observations have not been made to justify the slave trade or to suggest its revival. Each of them is a value-free scientific statement. These observations are also a challenge to the rulers of the region to recognize the fundamental character of the challenges facing them in the areas of economic development and social engineering.

APPENDIX 1

DESPATCH FROM HIGH COMMISSIONER MOOR, 7 JULY 1901: CURRENCY ISSUE

90 Bedford Court Mansions,
W. C.

S. S. "Olenca"
7th July, 1901.

Sir,

Replying to your dispatch No. 38 of the 22nd March enclosing Report of the West African Currency Committee and requesting a report on certain specified points and generally on the subject of the introduction of currency into West Africa, I have the honour to point out that no mention is made in the report of the advantages other than that of profit which will result from the introduction of a currency. As far as Southern Nigeria is concerned the establishment of a system of currency is of the utmost importance as a civilizing factor apart altogether from other considerations, such as the so called "profit," which render it the more desirable.

2. Trade in the territories is now conducted by barter and through the medium of cumbersome imported native currencies, brass rods and manillas also cowries in some areas, and in this category may also be included slaves who in actual trade transactions are a sort of ambulating currency transporting together with themselves the native currencies. The Aro Tribes inhabiting the country between the Niger and Cross Rivers are the principal dealers in slaves in this manner, three branches of the tribe being engaged in raiding while the fourth branch, the Inokuns are the slave dealers. These Inokuns carry large quantities of trade goods into the interior by contract portorage with the Ibos, of which nation they with the Abams, Ohoffias, and Baribas, form a tribe or tribes; for it is open to doubt whether they claim to be the same or separate tribes, but there is no doubt but that they are closely connected and work together. The trade goods are disposed of in exchange for slaves, brass rods, or

Source: PRO, C.O., 520/12, Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Colonial Office, 1901.

manillas, with which the Inokuns return to the markets of the middlemen. The slaves are sold by barter direct or for brass rods and manilas, fresh supplies of trade goods purchased and conveyed inland when a similar transaction is repeated. It may be taken as undoubted fact that the use of the cumbersome currencies of brass rods and manillas, 30/- worth of either of which is a full load for one carrier, encourages slavery not only amongst the slave raiders and dealers who operate on land, but with the middlemen who have to convey these currencies to market by water in canoes. My dispatch of the 7th instant with reference to the enforcement of the "slave dealing proclamation" 1901 explains more fully the question of slavery.

3. The difficulties of a trade conducted entirely by barter are so evident and the evils consequent on such a system have been so often dilated on that it would be but waste of time to more than refer to them. The principal difficulties most evident in Southern Nigeria are:-

- (a) Considerable limitation in the area that can be opened up for trade.
- (b) Restricted power of selection in the purchase of trade goods with produce.
- (c) Limitation in classes of goods imported and consequently in demand.
- (d) Excessive trouble and time in conduct of all transactions.
- (e) Continual disputes as to terms of bargains.

The principal evils are:-

- (a) Encouragement of slavery.
- (b) Excessive tendency to fraud.
- (c) Absence of all means, inducement or possibility of thrift or saving except by investment in slaves.
- (d) Seizures of boys, canoes, trade goods, and produce, in consequence of trade disputes.

The barter system is really rather aggravated in Southern Nigeria by the use of the imported forms of native currency, for they are so cumbersome as to be practically of no real assistance in the conduct of trade, and in areas where they are in use only lead to multiplication of the transactions without any corresponding advantage further than that they are not of perishable nature nor so liable to damage as ordinary trade goods or produce. They provide to an extent a means of saving, but of such a cumbersome and unwieldy nature as to be of no general utility to the means of the population. Their principal use is in the purchase of food supplies and it is no doubt for this purpose they were originally introduced. The brass rod and manilla may be regarded as having an economic value in addition to a currency value, for they are used for the manufacturers of ornaments, and when damaged are broken up for use as ammunition.

4. I am of opinion that as long as the systems of barter and existing cumbersome native currencies continue in vogue the expansion of trade is

severely hampered and that a stable and reliable trade cannot be definitely established. Further, with these systems it is impossible to arrive at such sound economic conditions in the Territories as tend to peace, good order, and extension of civilization. Trade as carried on by such means tends rather to introduce the vices and not the benefits of civilization and can hardly be regarded as a factor in improving the existing conditions of life.

5. Brass rods and manillas vary to such an extent in their purchasing power and value that they are hardly entitled to be considered as currency—yet they are undoubtedly used as such. In different seasons this variation is as much as 5-percent where trade transactions are concerned, but in the purchase of food stuffs it would not be so large. There is a wire known as “Black Coppers” that go 15 to 18 to the brass rod which should be included in the same category. In arguing the question as far as Southern Nigeria is concerned therefore it may be regarded that all the difficulties and evils of the barter system still exist.

6. The question of the introduction of a currency is in my mind so closely connected with that of slavery that the latter cannot in my opinion be effectively dealt with until some sound currency system has been introduced. If slavery is to be done away with it is essential that a labour market be established. Means must be provided for paying the labourers, which again necessitates the introduction of a currency. Doing away with slavery means revolutionizing the entire economic conditions of the country and the utmost precautions must be taken that care and foresight can suggest or a very large falling off in trade will in all probability ensue. The immediate introduction of a currency is in my view one of the most important provisions that requires to be made and I have consequently delayed writing in answer to your dispatch of the 7th instant with which I request that this despatch may be read.

7. In advocating immediate action with a view to the introduction of a currency, I would call attention to the advisability of power being vested in the Local Administrators to prohibit the import of any articles for use as currency such as brass rods, manillas, black coppers, cowries &c. I suggested this course in correspondence with the Foreign Office, a copy of which is given on page 16 of “Correspondence relating to the Currency of the West African Colonies,” Africa West No. 592, and further that a cash basis of trade should be enforced. These suggestions were referred to in the Colonial Office and Board of Trade with the result that they were disallowed, but it is probable that they were not fully understood and certainly as published in the print referred to they give rise to an erroneous inference on page 32 paragraph A.I. where it is stated that I suggested compulsory substitution of British coinage for brass rods. Such was not my suggestion for at the time the Consular Authority in the Protectorate acting under Africa Order in Council 1889 was only empowered to make laws affecting British subjects and legislation on the subject could not have affected

in any way transactions as between natives. If energetic measures are now to be taken with a view to introduce a currency then I submit that the import of brass rods &c. as currency must be prohibited—except in such quantities as may be found essential in the interests of trade for the first few years. Owing to the enhanced price of metals in Europe for the past few years and at present, rods and manillas for use as currency have not been imported as there is no profit on the transaction, but any fall in the price of metal would no doubt lead to their being again imported unless some other form of currency be sooner substituted, especially in the case of brass rods of which there is now some scarcity. If there is to be any so-called profit on the new currency then steps must certainly be taken to discourage the old and work it gradually out of use. This raises the question of exchange as between the new and old currencies—without which the holders of the old currency will undoubtedly be opposed to the introduction of the new, and I am of opinion that some definite rate of exchange might with advantage be fixed for all transactions as between natives. This course would encourage the substitution of the old by the new currency and while preventing loss to the present holder would obviate the necessity for the taking of any steps by the Administration to withdraw old currencies from use. The brass rods, manillas, cowries &c. are easily damaged and pass much more quickly out of use than cash currency. Further too, the brass rod has an economic value for use in the manufacture of brass ornaments and together with the manilla is used for breaking to be used as ammunition. I am of opinion that in the course of six or seven years after the introduction of a suitable cash currency these old forms would have disappeared.

8. I do not anticipate any serious difficulty in inducing the natives to accept a currency of a special nature. To the west of the Niger and among the Coast tribes British coin is now used to a considerable extent, but with tribes to west [*sic*] of Niger up to the German boundary, where the brass rod and manilla are in vogue such coin is hardly used at all except of course by Coast Tribes. It follows therefore that the special currency has to be substituted for British coin with the tribes to the west of the Niger and those of the Coast only and to be introduced as a new currency in all other portions of territories where imported and cumbersome forms of currency are now in use. To effect this as quickly as possible I suggest the prohibition of the import of all articles of any description in such form that they may be used as currency and the fixing of an arbitrary rate of exchange as between the new special currency and any existing old forms. Such action will I consider result in the new currency being quickly adopted and considerable absorption taking place which will give the desirable profit, but I submit that apart from the question of profit and whether the West African Colonies adopt the proposed special currency or not, it is essential that immediate steps be taken to introduce a sound currency in Southern Nigeria to meet the altered circumstances in economic conditions which will arise when the Slave Dealing Proclamation 1901 is brought into force.

9. I am distinctly in favour of the introduction of a special currency with gold standard on the lines proposed in the report but it is exceedingly difficult to gauge the absorption of silver coin that will take place in Southern Nigeria. I anticipate that for the first two or three years the absorption will be much slower than subsequently when the new has begun to effectively replace the old existing currencies and the advantages of the change are appreciated by the native. The stopping of slavery will give considerable impetus to the adoption and absorption of this new currency and I consider that the profit which for the first two or three years must be small will after that period be a rapidly increasing one and form an appreciable addition to Revenue. It is impossible to give any idea as to such profit in actual figures as the factors affecting the issue are so varied.

10. The success of the introduction of the special currency will depend to a large extent on the denomination of the coins it is determined to adopt and the extent to which they meet local requirements. It is of the utmost importance that the coinage should be such as to meet the ordinary requirements of daily life and provide a denomination sufficiently small for the purchase of daily necessities and supplies. These small transactions will provide the most frequent available means of securing the adoption of the currency as a whole and as apart from the question of profit it is for reasons before mentioned essential that a currency should be at once introduced into Southern Nigeria. It is not a matter of primary importance that there should be any margin of profit on the issue of the lower denominations of currency for on the high denominations of the silver tokens there must be a considerable profit.

11. The report of the Committee does not contemplate the issue of a coin of lower value than one farthing and this will not in my opinion meet local requirements. The cowry is the lowest purchasing medium that has to be met and the average value of this medium may be taken at 6d per thousand (?). The smallest tender of cowries having any purchasing power may be taken as 5 which would be given for a pinch of snuff or sprinkling of ground peppers. For practical purposes and as a purchasing medium I consider that 20 cowries may be regarded as a medium tender that could if possible be met by the coinage. The silver coin will no doubt be pieces representing 2/-, 1/-, 6d—, below which I consider that there should be only one coin as it is important to restrict the number of denominations with a view to avoiding multiplicity of calculations. It follows that in my view the smallest coin should represent roughly 1/8th of one penny or 1/24th of the three penny piece. It might however be an advantage to have a coin practically representing 10 cowries which would be 1/16th of a penny and 48 of which would represent the three penny piece. This may however be considered as rendering the coinage somewhat cumbersome, for which reason I adhere to a coin at 24 to the three penny piece which will I consider meet all practical local requirements. For purposes of calculation however it would probably be of advantage if such coin were

made 25 to the three penny piece as the natives would no doubt calculate them by “tally” and “half tally,” a method of calculation understood throughout the entire territories of Nigeria and the Coast generally. A coin such as this would compete with the cowrie and materially assist in the adoption of the new coinage. The question of the manufacture of it is a metallurgical one on which I can give no opinion but I would again submit that the question of profit on the issue of this coin is not one of primary importance. It is essential that the coin be of some white metal and not of bronze, which latter the native appears to have a rooted objection to. The shape should be round with a square hole in centre to allow of the coin being strung with “tie tie.”

12. I anticipate the principal difficulty to the introduction of the currency in Southern Nigeria from the European merchants and their Agents both directly and indirectly. Cash transactions as at present carried on are a tremendous advantage to the natives and the opportunities of profit on barter transactions are much greater than they will be when an equilibrium in cash trade has asserted itself, which it must do in time if there be competition. I will take an instance in Brass—The rate there for the purchase of produce now rules in gin of which 22 cases, representing an expenditure of £10 to the Agent on the Coast, are given for a puncheon of palm oil. If the native wishes to be paid in cash he receives between £6 and £7. Should he subsequently wish to purchase gin with the cash he has to pay £14 per case for it which will give him at the most 11 cases or just half the number he would have received had he bartered produce for gin in first instance. The intent in this transaction is of course to discourage cash trade as much as possible. It must not be supposed that 22 cases of gin are actually paid for a puncheon of palm oil, for that represents the rate of purchase only—gin in Brass being the currency quotation as in other places it is cloth. Probably the native receives 8 or 10 cases of gin and the balance in an assortment of trade goods, some of which he probably does not want but has to take to make up the rate. These matters will however right themselves when the currency is established if there be competition and I only point to them as showing the direction from which the main opposition and difficulty in introducing the currency may be anticipated.

13. It is possible that some difficulty in the opposition would be obviated if it were pointed out to the merchants that the profit which is anticipated will be derived by the Administration from the introduction of a special currency will have a tendency to keep down the duties chargeable in imports.

14. As regards the risk of a special coinage it seems to me that the so-called profits if properly dealt with will provide a sufficient guarantee for the token coinage if only reasonable care be taken to regulate the issue to meet actual requirements. Over and above such guarantee there should be a sound surplus that should assist the Revenues. The present position in Northern and Southern Nigeria where the British coinage is coming into use is that the

Administrations practically regulate the silver coinage and take all risks of repatriating any token currency that may become redundant in the territories. The risk of the Mint is that the repatriated coins may disturb the equilibrium as between the token and standard coinage in England which seems to be a very remote contingency. In addition to this very remote risk the Mint of course guarantees the token coinage. The Mint takes all profits resulting from the use of the British coinage and the Administrations that bear portion of the risk, none. I consider the Administrations may safely take all the risks and all the profits of a special coinage with advantage.

15. As far as Southern Nigeria is concerned I regard the introduction of currency as essential and urgent in view of the action it is proposed to take next dry season in opening up the country and dealing a death blow to slavery. I therefore request that the matter may receive prompt consideration.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your Obedient Servant,

R. Moor

High Commissioner.

APPENDIX 2

DESPATCH FROM HIGH COMMISSIONER MOOR, 7 JULY 1901: THE SLAVERY QUESTION

90 Bedford Court Mansions,
W. C.

S. S. "Olenca"
7th July, 1901.

Sir,

In continuation of my dispatch No. 72 of the 17th March last forwarding original and copies of "No. 5 The Slave Dealing Proclamation 1901" I have the honour to state that as proposed in paragraph 3 I have held meetings with the representative Chiefs at the following places—Old Calabar, Opobo, Okrika, Bonny, Degema, Brass, Warri, Sapele Benin River, Benin City, and subsequently a large meeting was held at Bonny at which the Chiefs of Opobo, Bonny, Okrika, New Calabar, and Brass attended, which lasted several days. The question of slavery was very fully gone into in all its aspects, and though the Chiefs on many grounds are averse to the change contemplated, they recognize that such changes must come and that in some respects they will be immediately beneficial to the country, though the matter will require most careful and judicious handling to avoid immediate and serious difficulties which might give rise to entire dislocation in the affairs of Government, Trade and Tribal control. The explanation of these matters must necessarily be somewhat lengthy in order to make clear the proposals which I shall put forward for dealing with them.

2. The existing sources from which slaves are at present originally obtained in the territories are:-

- (a) Natives seized by organized slave raiding and sold in slave markets.
- (b) Natives accused of witchcraft or crime forced by local public opinion to proceed and consult the oracles of the Aro Ju Ju hierarchy many of whom are seized and sold by the Ju Ju priests as slaves.

Source: PRO, C.O. 520/12, Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Colonial Office, 1901.

- (c) Natives seized in inter-tribal and other wars between towns and rival parties of the same tribe.
- (d) Natives, mostly children sold by their parents, guardians, or the Chiefs of a tribe, in trade transactions to liquidate debts or obtain trade goods.
- (e) Native children born in a state of slavery. These children are generally regarded as free in the tribe or house in which they are born but are liable to be sold or pawned.

3. The slaves referred to at paragraph 2 (a) are obtained on the East of the Niger principally from the Aro tribe, portions of which are engaged more or less in continuous slave raiding, while one branch of the tribe—the Inokuns—are the business people engaged principally in the slave dealing and doing but little in the manipulation of produce. The raiding sections of the tribe are the Abams, Ehoffias, and Baribas. The four sections may regard themselves as separate tribes forming a portion of the Ibo Nation but they are undoubtedly closely connected and work together in all transactions, fighting, slaving trading, &c. The Inokun section is divided into fourteen families, each having its own business route and any interference by one family with the business route of another leads promptly to internal dissension. The points at which these Inokuns come in contact for business purposes with the middlemen carriers of trade goods and produce are:-

- (1) Various points on the Cross River
- (2) To the North of Opobo around Azumini, Akwete, and upper Kwa River
- (3) To the North of New Calabar
- (4) Around Oguta Lake and
- (5) Some little distance inland to east of Niger.

To give some idea of the extent to which slave dealing is carried on by them I would refer to two known slave markets off the Cross River at Itu and Enyong, at the former of which I am correctly informed about 20 slaves can now be bought any market day and at the latter 40—both markets being held weekly. Some eight or nine years since I have myself seen at the market at least 100 slaves for sale on a market day, and the reduction to the present number given above is due to the action of the government, which though up to the present not sufficiently strong to directly stop the market, has by indirect action limited the demand to a great extent by stopping human sacrifices, discouraging purchase, &c. This is one of the main grievances of the Aros against the Government; also that there is difficulty in obtaining supplies owing to Government action generally and particularly in discrediting the Ju Ju Hierarchy of the tribe and thus practically doing away with the source of supply mentioned at paragraph 2 (b). I regret however to add that this pressure, which has now been brought to bear for some years without the question being actively and effectively dealt with, has resulted in a somewhat serious

outbreak which occurred in May last. The Inokuns brought down the Abams, and under a shallow pretext concerning the non-observance of Ju Ju rites on the killing of a dangerous leopard attacked and raided friendly tribes—the Ibibios and Kwas—killing large numbers, in one case wiping out a whole village, and carrying off all they could seize to sell as slaves. This raid occurred on the S. E. border of the Aro country, and the natives seized will no doubt be sold on the Western and Northern borders of the tribe. The necessary enquiries into this matter had not been completed before I left the Protectorate but were being actively prosecuted and a report will follow in due course.

4. Referring to paragraph 2 (b)—natives obtained for sale as slaves through the Ju Ju hierarchy—this is a source of supply for the Aro tribe only and may now be practically regarded as a negligible quantity for the Ju Ju priesthood has almost been entirely discredited by the action of the government in rescuing and returning to their homes on two occasions large batches of refugees who had sought to try the ordeal of the Aro Long Ju Ju but on arrival, suspecting the fraud of the proceeding, sought the protection of the government. These people on return to their homes pointed out the gross deception of the proceedings with the result that there are but few appeals to the Ju Ju now. The original number of one of these parties when proceeding to appeal to the Ju Ju was 400 and the number rescued was 138—the balance no doubt having been sold as slaves—which gives some idea as to the size of this source of supply formerly when none of those receiving the decision of long juju ever again saw their homes.

5. Dealing now with paragraph 2 (c)—natives seized in inter-tribal and other local wars—this source may now be regarded as an almost negligible quantity and will become entirely so as Governmental control becomes firmly established throughout the territories. To the west of the Niger where control is generally effective there are but very few natives sold into slavery from this cause, but to the north of the upper waters of the Cross River this is possibly the source of an appreciable local supply which will however soon disappear without any very serious difficulty when the area becomes opened up.

6. The source referred to at paragraph 2 (d)—native children sold or pawned by their parents, guardians or Chiefs of the tribe—is one in dealing with which great difficulty will, I anticipate, be experienced. I propose suggesting later on a scheme of apprenticeship with express or implied consent of children under which the parents or guardians will receive an apprenticeship fee in lieu of, as in ordinary cases, paying one. This supply is principally obtained on West of Niger for local requirements where the sources of supply referred to in paragraph 2 (a), (b) and (c) are non-existent but is also found to some extent to the East of the Niger and the demand on it will be liable to increase when the “raid” supplies are done away with. It would be exceedingly

hard to suppress this supply without some such alternative measure as I shall suggest, the adoption of which will I consider be sound policy.

7. Referring to paragraph 2 (e)—born slaves—A method for dealing with these cases will be proposed later on by which all children born in a tribe or house will be free members of such tribe or house with all the rights, privileges, obligations and duties accruing to such membership.

8. Having now dealt with the sources from which slaves are obtained it is necessary, in order to arrive at the real difficulties of the question, to determine who are the principal buyers and for what purposes the slaves are bought. Formerly of course there was a considerable purchase of slaves for sacrificial purposes, for properly carrying out the obsequies of deceased Chiefs and for general sacrifices, but human sacrifice for any and all purposes has practically been done away with in the territories though no doubt isolated cases will from time to time occur. The principal purchasers of slaves are the middlemen traders who are practically the carriers as between the European Merchants and the producers. The carrying is done by water in canoes, and for this purpose a large number of boys is required by these middlemen—and this is the point and aspect from which the greatest difficulty in dealing with the question will be experienced. No doubt the interior tribes are purchasers of slaves for their own use to some extent, but in these areas the prevention of raiding and the shutting of all slave markets will result in the natural death of slavery without any serious danger or difficulty arising, and it is only with the Coast Tribes—who are the middlemen traders—that such difficulties and dangers in dealing with the question are met with.

9. To arrive at the true aspect of the case as it affects the Coast Tribes it is necessary to go into the details of their organization to some extent and to study the system of native government and mode of life so that in appreciating the difficulties provision may be made to meet them in such manner that dislocation of existing methods of Government and Trade may not ensue in carrying the provisions of the Proclamation into effect. I would first premise by defining the absolute state of slavery as being that in which a man is and always remains in the position of goods and chattels, liable to be sold, pawned, or made away with, at the will of another, and cannot acquire or possess any rights or properties. I am not aware that any natives in Southern Nigeria are at the present day in this absolute state of slavery, though but a few years since it existed in a considerable area of the territories and has only been abolished by the establishment, action, and attitude, of the existing Government. With the Coast Tribes of middlemen traders such a state of slavery has, as far as I can learn, never really existed, for, though the bought slaves and even those born in the tribe or house were liable to be sold or pawned—for sacrificial purposes, which are now suppressed, slaves were always or nearly so especially bought—the industrious and intelligent slave could at all times acquire rights

and possess property and even become a sub-Chief and Chief of the Tribe and Head Chief of the house to which he belonged. There are now several Chiefs of the Coast Tribes, Head Chiefs of their houses, who were originally bought slaves. For some years past slaves bought by the Coast Tribes or born in the Tribes have been freed from the liability to be sold, by the prohibition of such sale by the Government though there has been no direct law on the subject. In isolated cases such sales have occurred, but the prohibition has been generally effective, I believe, and in the few cases of sale that have come to the knowledge of the Government the Chiefs responsible have been compelled to recover the persons sold at very considerable cost; so it may I think be regarded that such selling has ceased.

10. The Coast Tribes were formerly governed by so-called Kings, all of whom are now dead, and the present form of Native Government is by Native Council formed of a certain number of selected Chiefs appointed by the Government. The Tribe is divided into various Houses, each under its own Head Chief for managing its internal affairs. Under the Head Chief there may be several minor Chiefs and Headmen, each looking after his own family and the boys or slaves of the House or Family. The Head Chiefs of the Houses subscribe as required to carry on the affairs of the Tribe, and the minor Chiefs, headmen, and trading Boys of the House pay a certain tax to the Head Chief to enable him to carry on the affairs of the House. The conditions under which these Coast Tribes live at the mouth of the River in the deltoid and swampy areas of the territories are certainly not healthy or conducive to the propagation and rearing of children, especially having regard to the fact that in most cases they are far removed from their farms and in some cases have to rely to a great extent on inland tribes for their food supply except such as can be obtained by fishing. The habits and customs of these tribes are opposed in many ways to the upkeep or any increase of population, their women in most cases being averse to having many if any children for fear of bearing twins and other causes—the bearing of twins until quite lately having been regarded as casting a stigma on the mother which led to her being ostracized and the twins being killed. This has, however, now been abolished almost entirely I am glad to be able to state. The system of buying slaves, other people's children, also tends to induce the women to avoid the pains and labour of child bearing and rearing. Prostitution among the slaves of the tribes further tends to prevent the propagation of children. It follows that but for the bought slaves the members of the Coast Tribes would be continually decreasing, and the older Chiefs state, and there can I think be little doubt of the accuracy of their statement, that, if for the last thirty years slave buying had been prohibited, the tribes with their existing habits and customs would have disappeared. It is clear that there must be some change in the conditions of life, habits, and customs generally, of these tribes if they are to continue to exist and carry on the business of middlemen carriers after the Slave Dealing Proclamation comes

into force. The Chiefs fully recognize the state of affairs themselves and have discussed them most fully with me, and there is every tendency on their part and that of the intelligent and responsible members of the tribes to make a determined effort to meet the altered circumstances that will ensue when the buying of other people's children becomes unlawful.

11. From the foregoing it will be seen that the enforcing of the Slave Dealing Proclamation affects the very existence of the Coast Tribes, and it is only by some radical changes in their habits, customs, and mode of life generally that their practical disappearances can be prevented. Even with such changes it is open to doubt whether they will be able to maintain and efficiently carry on their existing business as middlemen carriers unless there be some system established by which, for a consideration, children from the interior tribes can be apprenticed to them for a period of years for general instruction in trade.

12. After careful consideration and enquiry I am satisfied that it would be impracticable to bring the proclamation into force in portions of the Protectorates only but that it must take effect throughout the entire territories at the same time. An opportunity for this course will arise when the Aro Expedition is carried out and slave raiding with the slave markets put a stop to. The greater part of the slave supply will then cease and the same movement should be taken advantage of to put a stop to the demand. This course will give rise to a further difficulty however which must be met before such action is actually taken. For some years past there has been talk and some slight agitation amongst the slaves of the Coast Tribes with regard to their freedom—or as the Chiefs themselves describe it “the Boys have become more arrogant,” and it has only been by the improvement in their condition of life generally and with a view to individual advancement effected by the advice of the Government that serious difficulty has been avoided. Before therefore the Proclamation is actually enforced, and the position of slavery practically abolished for the future, something further must be done to improve the condition of these slaves by removing them in some way from the state of slavery or there will be a danger of a general uprising which would mean anarchy, crime, and a general stoppage of trade. I propose therefore to bring into force a Proclamation, draft copy of which I enclose, by which all such slaves and any that may be born in slavery in future as referred to in paragraph 2 (e) and paragraph 7 will become actual members of the Houses to which they now belong or in which they are born with all the rights and privileges of that position and subject to all the obligations imposed by Native Law and Custom. The draft is hardly complete and requires some slight elaboration conferring power on the High Commissioner to define the areas in which the law shall take effect, and it may also be advisable to embody with it the system of apprenticeship referred to in paragraph 6.

13. With regard to paragraph 2 (d) and paragraph 6 with reference to children sold by their parents or guardians into a state of slavery in the ordinary

course of trade transactions it will I consider be to the advantage of the Coast as well as the Interior tribes if a system be formulated and authorized by which the Chiefs of Coast tribes can, by paying a consideration to members of the Interior tribes, obtain apprentices to be attached to their houses for the purpose of learning the system of trade &c. I should suggest that such period of apprenticeship should be allowed to extend to 12 years and that during it the Boys should have the rights and privileges of members of the house and also be subject to the obligations of that position—further, that at the age of 15 and 16 they should have the right of declaring themselves permanent members of the Houses to which they may be attached. Such a course will be to the general advantage of all concerned and will undoubtedly assist and facilitate trade; it will also be of considerable advantage to the Coast tribes and business generally by assisting in providing for the continuance of the carrying business of the middlemen. The boys apprenticed would commence by going to the markets as canoe paddlers, and those found intelligent and industrious would in time be promoted to the position of traders for the house and gradually would become traders on [their] own account. There should be provision for the revocation of the apprenticeship deed on proof by the coaster in court that the apprentice is idle or worthless from any cause, in which event he should be returned to his parents or guardians without any refund of the apprenticeship fee.

14. It is in my view of the utmost importance to the success of the Territories that the coast tribes of middlemen carriers be supported by the Government and that all possible steps be taken to enable them to maintain their position both as regards trade and numbers, also that their native systems of Government should be strenuously upheld and enforced with such improvements as may from time to time be found for the general welfare of the people and the country. An enquiry is now in the course of being held by the medical Department with regard to possible improvement in existing conditions of life, more especially as affecting the propagation and rearing of children and the causes of infant mortality, with a view to such improvements in native habits and customs as may be found practicable.

15. The method by which the affairs of the tribes are provided for as stated in paragraph 10 by the various houses is satisfactory and needs no revision. As stated in the same paragraph the houses are supported by subscription from minor chiefs, headmen, and such boys as are allowed to trade on their own account. The rates levied however in this manner are not equitable but it is necessary to support the system to provide means for the maintenance of the various houses. I have consequently had prepared a draft native law with reference to this trade tax, copy enclosed, which I propose to have adopted by the various coast tribes to which it is applicable. The tax now paid is known variously as “topping” and “work Bar” and is deducted by the European trading agents when buying produce from minor chiefs, headman, or boys and

subsequently handed over to the head chief of the house. The draft Native law provides that the tax shall be at the rate of 5 per cent and that the collection of it shall be a transaction as between the head chief and members of a house, with right of appeal to a competent court, which would in the ordinary course of events be the native council. I consider it inadvisable to allow the European trading Agents to be intermediaries in transactions of this nature, though they must of course be liable to be called as witnesses concerning the transactions on which it is sought to levy the tax. On a former occasion I put a stop to European agents acting as intermediaries, but unfortunately during my absence on leave they have been allowed to resume that position, which I consider damaging to the authority and position of the chiefs and government generally.

16. This matter is one that requires to be promptly dealt with if the opportunity of the proposed Aro expedition is to be taken advantage of to finally abolish slavery and put a stop to the selling and pawning of slaves throughout the whole of Southern Nigeria, and I strongly recommend that course; for an equally good one for effectively dealing with the question is not likely to occur again. I therefore request that immediate consideration be given the question that definite details may be arranged if the course I suggest is approved.

17. I would request that this dispatch and my dispatch of even date on the subject of the introduction of currency in West Africa be read together as in my opinion the two subjects so affect the economic conditions of the country that they must be considered and dealt with together.

I am,

Sir,

Your most obedient

Humble servant.

R. Moor

High Commissioner.

APPENDIX 3

LIST OF SUSPECTED SLAVE DEALERS

1. *Okuehe of Amachara, Ibo*: Stolen children are taken to Okuehe and he sends a boy Obona Izala to Aro Chuku either by train as far as Aba or by bicycle to call Ngwu of Aro Chuku, Kalu of Aro Chuku and Lemadim of Aro Chuku. These three men are alleged to be well-known buyers of children. They go to Amachara and buy any children in possession of Okuehe and return by bush path through Uzuakoli, Bende and on to Aro Chuku. They also deal with an Amachara man named Ubendu (see no. 3) and his brothers Owadelachi and Eromuanya (nos. 4 & 5).
2. *Onukaike of Oga, Bende Division, Ibo*: Children are taken to him by Jonathan Nwosu of Avutu, Obowo, Okigwe Division. Onukaike takes the children to Okrika or Bonny with the aid of any woman he can induce to assist him. The duty of the woman being to pass the children off as her own if questioned.
3. *Ubendu of Amachara, Ibo*: Children are brought to Ubendu by Ihemebiri of Alike, Obowo, Okigwe Division. Ubendu sells the children to Okori of Aro Ajatori, an Aro man. Okori takes the children to Aro Chuku or Okrika. Okori also sells children to Ngwu of Aro Chuku. Igwe of Amachara acts as messenger between Ubendu and Ngwu. Ubendu is the principal man in this traffic at Amachara.
4. *Eromoanya of Amachara, Ibo*: Brother of no. 3. Children are taken to him by Lazarus Okeke of Umuihi. . . . He sells them to Kalu of Aro Chuku and Obuka of Aro Chuku, Aro, Nlemadim of Aro Chuku.
5. *Owadelachi of Amachara, Ibo*: Brother of nos. 3 and 4. He gets the children from Okuehe (1) and sells to Ngwu of Aro Chuku. The children are sometimes taken to Ngwu at Amachara and at other times to Ngwu at Aro Chuku. Nos. 3 and 5 sometimes work together. Nos. 4 and 5 live together in the same compound.

Source: NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, Child Stealing, 217/vol. ii/189, 11 October 1934, from C. R. Bell, Assistant Superintendent of Police, to the Inspector-General of Police, Lagos.

6. *Ezeala of Umuabali, Amachara, Ibo*: Children are brought to him by Ihembri of Alike, Obowo, Okigwe Division. Ezeala sells to Uzoebu of Umuda, Bende Division. Uzoebu sells to Kalu of Amanagwu, Aro Chuku. Ezeala also gets children from Okuehe (No. 1).
7. *Jonah of Osa, Amachara, Ibo*: Buys children from Opara Ibeme, Okigwe Division. Jonah sells to Okori of Ajataori, Bende Division. Okori sells to Ubendu (No. 3) or takes them to Aro Chuku.
8. *Umunakwe of Amachara, Ibo*: Works in conjunction with Ubendu (No. 3). Takes children from Ubendu to Ngwu at Aro Chuku.
9. *Nwankwere of Amafo, Bende Division, Ibo*: Children are brought to him by Nwokoafor of Alike Obowo, Okigwe Division. Nwankwere takes them to Ngwu at Aro Chuku (No. 34).
10. *Ibekwe of Umungwa, Obowo, Okigwe Division, Ibo*: Brings children to Ubendu of Amachara (see No. 3).
11. *Nnyama of Alike, Obowo, Ibo*: Brings children to Ubendu of Amachara (see No. 3).
12. *Kemakalam of Umuokrika, Owerri Division, Ibo*: Brings children to Ubendu of Amachara (see No. 3). Alleged to be one of the principal traders in children in Owerri Division.
13. *Nwaokoroafor of Umunwanwa, Bende Division, Ibo*: Takes children to Ubendu (see No. 3).
14. *Abo of Nkatalike, Okohuga, Bende Division, Ibo*: For many years lived in Aro Chuku. Children are taken to him by Lemadim.
15. *Ahamaefule of Umuakam, Okehuga, Bende Division*: Lemadim gets them from Ogbenna (see No. 18) of Umuchere. Ogbenna gets them from Ogwugwu (see No. 36) of Umuabalia, Obowo, Okigwe Division.
16. *Njoku of Umukabia, Obowo, Okigwe Division, Ibo*: Takes children to Ogbonna of Umuhoro, Bende Division (see No. 18).
17. *Uzuanya of Umuezereola, Okehuga, Bende Division, Ibo*: Gets children from Ogbonna (see No. 15) and Njoku (see No. 16) and Njoku takes them to Abo.
18. *Ogbenna of Umuahoro, Bende Division, Ibo*: Alleged to be a trader for many years.
19. *Ezeibe of Umu Ezereola, Bende Division, Ibo*: Gets children from Ogbenna of Umukabia, Obowo, Okigwe Division.
20. *Ugiri of Amanze, Obowo, Okigwe, Ibo*: Takes children to Ogi of Amogwugwu, Bende Division. Ogi sells to Aro people.

21. *Jiwunze of Umunwanwa, Obowo Okigwe, Ibo*: Sells children to Eromuanya of Amachara (a brother of Ubendu). Eromuanya sells to Kalu of Aro Chuku.
22. *Nwauluka of Owerri Division, Ibo*: Sells children to Ubendu of Amachara (see No. 3).
23. *Mbaka of Alike, Obowo, Okigwe Division, Ibo*: Sells children to Ubendu of Amachara (see No. 3).
24. *Oyo of Umungwa, Obowo, Okigwe Division, Ibo*: Takes children to Ibegbu of Umuasam, Ekenobize, Bende Division. Ibegbu takes children to Obio of Umuere, Bende Division. Obio gives the children to his brother, Obase of Umuere to take to Aro Chuku.
25. *Agbayeremu of Kikeuku, Ekenobize, Bende Division, Ibo*: Receives children from Ugogwu of Umuhi, Obowo, Okigwe Division and takes them to Okrika.
26. *Nwokoma of Umuogba, Okehuga, Bende Division, Ibo*: Receives slaves from one Charles of Alike, Obowo, Okigwe Division and takes the children to Okrika.
27. *Ugagwu of Umuihi, Obowo, Okigwe Division, Ibo*: Sells children to Ogi Ogodo of Anogwogu, Bende Division who takes them to Okrika.
28. *Okpara Osu of Aro Okahia Uga, Bende Division, Ibo*: Buys children from Ogaranu of Aro Ata, Owerri Division and takes them to Aro.
29. *Echemaza of Aro Ata, Owerri Division, Ibo*: sells children to Okuehe of Amachara (see No. 1). Also sells children to Nwosu of Aro Okahia Uga, Bende Division. Nwosu takes the children to Aro Chuku.
30. *Irojegbe of Aro Okahia Uga, Bende Division, Ibo*: Acts as messenger for Ubendu (see No. 3) of Amachara. Informs Lemadim of Aro Chuku when Ubendu has children for disposal.
31. *Njoku of Alike, Obowo, Okigwe Division, Ibo*: Takes children to Ngwule of Umuokpara Amachara and also to Obioma of Umuabali, Amachara.
32. *Okonkwo of Alike, Obowo, Okigwe Division, Ibo*: Sells children to Akowundu of Okahi Uga, Bende Division, who takes the children to Aro Chuku.
33. *Ogwugwu of Umukabia, Obowo, Okigwe Division, Ibo*: Sells children to Abo of Nkatalike, Okohuga, Bende Division (see No. 14) and to Ezeibe of Umuezeola, Bende Division (see No. 19).
34. *Ngwu of Aro Chuku, Ibo*: Obtains children from Ubendu of Amachara (see No. 3) and Nwankwere (?) of Amafo, Bende Division (see No. 9). Alleged to be one of the principal traders of children in Aro Chuku.

35. *Obuka of Aro Chuku, Ibo*: Buys children from Ubendu of Amachara (see No. 3).

36. *Obuagwo of Amachara, Bende Division, Ibo*: Buys children from Ubendu (see No. 3) and sells to Okori of Ajataori (see No. 3).

APPENDIX 5

PROCEEDINGS IN THE CASE OF ALAEKWE AND CHIKEYE OF NGODO

IN THE PROVINCIAL COURT OF THE PROVINCE OF OWERRI
IN THE PROVINCIAL COURT OF THE DISTRICT OF OKIGWI

1. ALAEKWE (m) OF NGODO, OKIGWI DISTRICT
2. CHIKEYE (m) OF NGODO, OKIGWI DISTRICT

stand charged before the Court for that they in or about the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and twenty-eight, did commit the following offences:

STATEMENT OF OFFENCE

1. Child-stealing. Contra. Section 371 Cap 21, Laws of Nigeria
2. Slave dealing. Contra. Section 369 (1) and (2) Cap 21 Laws of Nigeria

PARTICULARS OF OFFENCE

That the above accused did about the time stated forcibly or fraudulently take away the child IGWE (being under 12 years of age) with intent to deprive the parents of the said IGWE of his possession; and did thereafter dispose of the said IGWE as a slave and in presence and hearing of the said ALAEKWE and CHIKEYE

1. Obuka (m) of Ngodo
2. Chiekwe (f) of Ngodo
3. Eziukwu (m) of Aba
4. Imo-Ekpe (m) of Ngodo

Source: NNAE, Rivprof 9/1/321, OW 2371, Rex vs Alaekwe and Chikeye of Ngodo, Okigwi District, charged with Child Stealing and Slave Dealing.

5. P.C. No. 3182 Asiegbu Madi
6. Police Sergeant Onyebula

depose on oath as follows:

Firstly Obuka (m) S/S. My name is Obuka; I am a native of NGODO. Six years ago one CHIKEYE (Second Accused) came to my house and asked me to give him my eldest son IGWE to serve him as a domestic servant. I told him I did not know him and advised him to bring someone to guarantee him. He brought his broker ALAEKWE (first accused), whom I knew, and I gave my son IGWE to ALAEKWE. At that time IGWE was about so high (Witness indicates the height of child about four or five years old).

After the boy had been gone about a year, about Christmas time, I asked ALAEKWE to restore him to me. ALAEKWE said he had given the boy to one EZIKWU and that EZIKWU would restore the child to me in due course; he said that EZIKWU was a big man. Since then I have asked ALAEKWE several times for return of the child, and I have held meetings in the house of Alaekwe's father; but all the time they said the boy was not lost. On these occasions my wife CHIEKWE and one IMO-EKPE used to accompany me. ALAEKWE (whose other name is OKOROAFOR) and his father offered me another child in place of my own; I refused this and insisted that they should restore my own child. Alaekwe's father came to my house and made me swear a promise not to report the matter to the Police; he then promised to look for my child. This is sometime ago; I do not know how long I have not seen the child however. I have not hitherto reported the matter to the Police because of the oath I was made to swear. Moreover I have no money to take civil action against ALAEKWE.

No questions by first accused.

No questions by second accused.

(Sgd.) L. N. Ebere

Witness to Mark

Taken and sworn before me this 13-2-34

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop

A.D.O.

Secondly CHIEKWE (f) S/S. My name is Chiekwe, I am a wife of first witness, I am mother of the missing boy IGWE. Six years ago, at our house, my husband and I gave our eldest son IGWE to first accused ALAEKWE, acting on behalf of his brother CHIKEYE second accused, to serve as a domestic servant. I had then one child younger than IGWE. Two months afterwards we asked ALAEKWE to bring our boy IGWE back to us. We went on asking him continually, but have never seen the boy again. We used to go to the house of

Alaekwe's father to press them to restore the boy. They kept on putting us off from time to time.

ALAEKWE and his father offered us another boy in place of IGWE; but we refused, and asked them to bring us back our own. They made us swear juju not to report this matter. We had no money to take civil action. They said that they would try to find the child; we have never seen him again however.

In answer to question by first accused ALAEKWE

(1) When you took the boy you said he was intended for some one else.

In answer to questions by second accused CHIKEYE

(1) You first asked for the boy, we refused. Then we finally handed the boy to ALAEKWE to give to you.

Read over and found correct.

Chiekwe Her X Mark

(Sgd.) L. N. Ebere

Witness to Mark

Taken and sworn before me this 13-2-34

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop

A.D.O.

Thirdly EZIUKWU (m) S/S. My name is EZIKWU, I am a native of NDIS-UORGU; I am an ARO. I married a woman from second accused CHIKEYE's town about seven years ago; and used to see CHIKEYE at the time. EGWUONWU (alias Harrison), a relative of CHIKEYE, has been living with me at Aba since then; he left me last year as the result of a palaver. I know first accused ALAEKWE. He used to come to my house sometimes; the last occasion was about six months ago, when he came from Okrika.

In answer to question by Court.

- (1) Neither of the accused ever brought a boy to me.
- (2) I never asked either of the accused to bring a boy to me.

In answer to question by accused ALAEKWE.

- (1) Since I married the woman from your town, I have been to your town several times for the purpose of trading. I often saw you there on these occasions.
- (2) When I was trading at your town NGODO, I used to stay in the house of one NWEZIBE.
- (3) It is about one mile by the path from Nwezibe's house to the house of the man from whom I married my wife.
- (4) I never stayed in your house.

- (5) The reason you know so much about my private affairs is because you now employ a boy whom I dismissed for theft.

No questions by second accused.

Read over and found correct. Eziukwu His Mark (Sgd.) L. N. Ebere

Witness to Mark

Taken and sworn before me this 13-2-34

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop

A.D.O.

13. 2. 34

Fourthly IMO-EKPE S/S. My name is Imo-Ekpe; I am a native of NGODO. About six years ago when I was in the house of OBUKA (first witness); CHIKEYE (second accused) came to us and asked OBUKA and CHIEKWE, my sister (who is mother of the child and wife to OBUKA) to give him their child IGWE as a domestic servant. We refused unless he produced a guarantor. He sent his brother ALAEKWE whom we knew, and we handed over the boy to ALAEKWE on the understanding that ALAEKWE was to give him to the other accused CHIKEYE to be personal servant to CHIKEYE and no one else. We asked at what time we might expect the boy back; and ALAEKWE said we might expect him in the month of Christmas, i.e. within about three months.

At Christmas time we enquired but were put off. We have been to ALAEKWE at NGODO many times since to ask for return of the boy, but we were always put off.

We have not reported the matter to the police before, because ALAEWE and his father made us swear juju not to report the matter, on the understanding that they would use every effort to find the child. We still have not received the child. The child was about six years old at the time we handed him over to ALAEKWE.

In answer to questions by court.

- (1) CHIKEYE was not present when we handed over the boy to ALAEKWE; ALAEKWE alone came.
- (2) CHIKEYE never came together with ALAEKWE to our house before we handed over the boy to ALAEKWE.
- (3) We have asked CHIKEYE about the whereabouts of the child.
- (4) The two accused live in different houses, but the houses are quite close.

No question by first accused ALAEKWE.

No questions by second CHIKEYE.

Read over and found correct.

Imo-Ekpe His X Mark

(Sgd.) L. N. Ebere

Witness to Mark

Taken and sworn before me this 13-2-34

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop

A.D.O.

FIFTHLY ASIEGBU MADI. P. C. 3182. S/S:- I am a police constable stationed at Okigwi. On the 13th of November last I was sent to Ngodo to arrest CHIKEYE and ALAEKWE, the two accused, on charges of stealing two children. I arrested and cautioned CHIKEYE; whereupon CHIKEYE said that it was true he had taken two boys and had given them to a man called EZIUKU at Aba. I could not find ALAEKWE. I brought CHKEYE into Okigwe; later on ALAEKWE was sent by his townspeople into Okigwe. At Okigwi I arrested and cautioned ALAEKWE. ALAEKWE thereupon said it was true that he had given two children to CHIKERE to take to Aba. The two accused both said they had not stolen the two children; they admitted that the names of the children they had taken were Igwe and Wakuonye.

The two accused said that both the boys were in the possession of one EZIUKU at Aba. I went to Aba. I found no trace of either of the boys. I arrested and cautioned EZIUKU; EZIUKU denied that the accused had brought any children to him. I brought EZIUKU into Okigwi; and the charge against him was later on withdrawn.

No questions.

Read over and found correct.

(Sgd.) Asiebu.

Taken and sworn before me this 16-2-34

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop.

A.D.O.

SIXTHLY POLICE SERGT. ONYEBULA S/S:- I am Sergeant in charge of the detachment at Okigwi. I produce in evidence a statement made by each accused. After being cautioned they said they wished to make statements. I said if they did so I would put the statement into writing. They still wished to make statements. (Alaekwe's statement produced in court as Exhibit A;

Chikeye's statement as Exhibit B.) Each accused made his mark to his own statement.

No questions.

Read over and found correct. (Sgd.) Sgt. D. M. Onyebula

Taken and sworn before me this 16-2-34

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop.

A.D.O.

FIRST ACCUSED ALAEKWE (electing to make a statement on oath), sworn states:-

It is against Native Law and Custom to sell a child. The mother, Chiekwe, of the boy IGWE was born in my town. EZIUKU came to LOKPA (under Isuochi N.C.) where he married a woman; he asked me there to procure him a boy as a domestic servant. This was about six years ago; in a short time afterwards I took the boy IGWE to EZIUKU at LOKPA to serve him as a domestic servant. EZIUKU took the boy IGWE with him to ABA, where he usually lived. EZIUKU is my good friend. On one occasion EZIUKU asked me to come to ABA to make medicine for a policeman called Ben who was ill; I complied and Ben recovered. When I came into Okigwi I told the Sergeant that I was afraid to recover IGWE from EZIUKU, since he was a big man and might bring a case against me. It is against Native Law and Custom to sell a child. I am prepared to swear any juju against EZIUKU; I am willing to bring 10 men to swear with me. My brother Chikeye will bear out my statement; I have no other witness.

Read over and found correct.

Alaekwe His X mark

Taken and sworn before me this 16-2-34

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop

A.D.O.

I certify that the above statement of the first accused Alaekwe was taken in my presence and hearing at Okigwi on the 16th February 1934, and contains accurately the whole statement of the accused.

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop

A.D.O.

SECOND ACCUSED CHIKEYE (electing to make a statement on oath) sworn states:-

All my brother ALAEKWE first accused has said is true. My brother spoke the truth. EZIUKU asked my brother for a boy and my brother took the boy IGWE to him at Lokpa. I knew EZIUKU through my brother Alaekwe. For a

time I served EZIUKU as a servant. I do not know how my brother obtained either IGWE or WAKUONYE to give to EZIUKU; but I understand that he obtained them by consent of the parents. Each boy was handed over on a separate occasion to EZIUKU with an interval of a few days in-between. The two boys were obtained from separate sources. I left EZIUKU'S service finally three years ago. I have not returned to his house since. I have no witness other than my brother ALAEKWE.

Read over and found correct.

Chikeye his X mark

Taken and sworn before me this 16-2-34

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop

A.D.O.

I certify that the above statement of the second accused CHIKEYE was taken in my presence and hearing at Okigwi on the 16th February, 1943, and contains accurately the whole statement of the said accused.

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop

A.D.O.

Under authority of section 69 Cap. 20, Laws of Nigeria the accused

- (1) ALAEKWE of Ngodo and
- (2) CHIKEYE of Ngodo are committed for trial to the Provincial Court of Owerri Province presided over by the Resident in charge of Owerri Province or by any other member of the Provincial Court of Owerri Province exercising the full powers of Provincial Court.

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop.

A.D.O.

16-2-34.

In accordance with section 72 Cap. 20 Laws of Nigeria the accused were informed of their privilege granted to them under this section, but did not avail themselves thereof.

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop

A.D.O.

16-2-34.

I certify that the depositions of Obuka, Chiekwe, Eziukwu, Imo Ekpe and P.C. No 3182 Asiebu Nadi were rendered in the Ibo language and

were correctly interpreted by me from Ibo into English and from English into Ibo. The depositions were read over to the witnesses who acknowledged them to be correct and made their marks and signature thereto in my presence.

(Sgd.) L. N. Ebere,

Sworn Interpreter & witness to mark.

I certify that the evidence of Sgt. D. M. Onyebula was given in English and was correctly translated into Ibo by me; it was read over to the witness who acknowledged it was correct and made his signature thereto.

(Sgd.) L. N. Ebere,

Sworn Interpreter.

I also certify that the statements of the two accused Alaekwe and Chikeye were made in the Ibo language and were correctly interpreted by me from Ibo into English and from English into Ibo. The statements were read over to the accused who appeared clearly to understand them and made their marks thereto in my presence.

(Sgd.) L. N. Ebere,

Sworn Interpreter & witness to mark.

EXHIBIT "A"

Statement of Alaekwe of Ngodo (accused).

Sir years ago my brother Chiekeye sent me to get him servants who would help him while he was doing work of trade. He then went to Obuka and his wife and asked them to give him their son Igwe for servant. Obuka then refused to give him and asked him to bring me. I went to him he told me that my brother Chiekeye had come to take his son for servant. He then hand over the boy to me and I hand to my brother at Ngodo. He went back to Aba with Eziuku his master. I went to Aba three times to see them. After a year the parents began to ask whether the boy would not return. I heard from my brother that he cannot find the boy. When I went to Aba I cannot see them. I did not report to Police about the missing of the boy. The parents used to come to our house and ask of their child and I used to tell them I would go out in search of them. I start to search of the boy 3 years ago.

Alaekwe His X mark

Witness to mark & writer.

(Sgd.) D. M. Onyebula,

Sergt. 3026

Certified true copy

I. R. P. Heslop

A.D.O.¹

EXHIBIT "B"

Statement of Chikeye of Ngodo (accused).

Six years ago, I sent my brother Alaekwe to Obuka and his wife Chiekwe, and tell them to give me their son Igwe for boy servant and they agreed and hand over the boy to him, he brought the boy to me at Ngodo. I took the boy to Aba. I was then lodging in one house with Eziuku. About two years after, I left the boy in charge of my house there and went to Lokpa to demand debt from a certain man Okala. I was in his house he left me and went to Eziuku's house and reported me that I used some foolish words to him. When Eziuku heard this word he was very angry and thought to ruin me, he took the two boys of mine who are in the same house with him away and hid them. Eziuku came to Lokpa and summoned me before the townspeople, he returned to Aba before me and I remained to demand the debt. Afterwards I returned to Aba and I could not found the boys. I went away from Aba for 3 weeks when I returned I did not see the boys. Eziuku was then in the house. I asked him where are the boys he said do I think he was playing when he told me of the words he heard I used for him, and that if I do not explain to him why I used such words he would not show me the boys they are in possession.

I sent a letter to my brother Alaekwe to come and hear what he said. Before my brother came he escaped away and locked my properties in the house and went away with my keys.

Why I did not report to Police he is a big man he get money than I, if I report him he would spent his money and lock me up. Three [years?] since ago, the boys were missing I have seen the accused four times and he had been seen by several people of our house, and asked for the return of them. I used to tell the parents to be patient I would bring them home because I did not sale them.

Chiekeye His X mark

Writer & witness to mark,

(Sgd.) D. M. Onyebula, Sgt. 3026

18/1/34

Certified true copy

I. R. P. Heslop

A.D.O.²

1. Handwritten certification.

2. Handwritten certification.

APPENDIX 4

ADDITIONAL LIST OF SUSPECTED SLAVE DEALERS

Additional Information for Previous List

36. [*sic*] *Ngwu has been identified as Ngwu Obuka of Ibom, Aro Chuku*: Staying at Akpuoha or Kporikpo, Afikpo Division and sells the children he obtains from Amachara to the people of Akunakuna and Ikunu, Afikpo Division.
37. *Eme has been identified as living at Akpuoha, Afikpo Division*: It is alleged he was very friendly with Ngwu Obuka when he was at Akpuoha. Sells the children he obtains from Amachara to the people of Akunakuna and Ikunu.
38. *Obuka*: Same as Ngwu Obuka (No. 36).
39. *Lemadin of Ibom, Aro Chuku, Ibo*: Father's name Okorafor Obasi of Ibom. Alleged to be a prominent trader of children (see Nos. 1 and 4) and sells children whom he obtains from Amachara to people of Akunakuna and Ikunu, Afikpo Division. Has a gunshot wound on the neck. Does not live permanently at Ibom but usually travels between Edda and Unwana, Afikpo Division.
40. *Kurio of Umungwa, Obowo Okigwe Division, Ibo*: Takes children from Umungwa to one Obia Anum (F) at Umon, Aro Division (see No. 41).
41. *Obia Agum Anum (F) of Umon, Aro Division, Ibo*: Recently this woman was found in possession of four girls from Umungwa, Obowo, Okigwe Division. It is alleged that three of the girls were brought to her by Kurio (see No. 40) and the other she bought herself from Umungwa. The four girls were repatriated to Okigwe by the District Officer Okigwe who has the matter in hand.
42. *Tortes Ene Ibom, Aro Division, Ibo*: Alleged to be connected with the traffic of children between Eluama Isu, Umuogbara and Umuneku, Okigwe Division, and Akunakuna, Afikpo Division.

Source: NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136: Child Stealing, 217/vol. ii/199, 1 November 1934, from C. R. Bell, Assistant Superintendent of Police, to the Inspector-General of Police, Lagos.

43. *Nwosu of Aro Utuoro, Okigwe Division, Ibo*: Deals with children at Nguodo and Ihube, Okigwe Division. When he has children he sends for his son, Oji Nwosu of Ndeike, Ibom, Aro Division, who takes them to Ikunu and Akunakuna.

44. [*sic*] *Onyejuruwa Onwubiko of Ibom, Aro Ibo*: Has a house at Ikunu. Buys children at Nsukka. Takes the children to Ikunu for sale.

45. *Okereke Uche of Ibom, Aro Division, Ibo*: Boy to Ngwu Obuka (No. 36). At times proceeds to Amachara and brings back children to Ngwu Obuka.

46. *Okoro Obuka of Ibom, Aro Division, Ibo*: Brother to Ngwu Obuka (see No. 36). At times proceeds to Amachara and brings back children to Ngwu Obuka.

47. *Kanu Obi of Ibom, Aro Division Ibo*: At times accompanies Ngwu Obuka (see No. 36) to Amachara when Ngwu goes there for children.

48. *Anukwa Mboro, of Ibom, Aro Division, Ibo*: Now living at Igbo, Obubra Division. Buys children at Ize near Nsukka. Takes the children from Ize to Igbo and later sells them at Gumo, Obubra Division. It is alleged that the person he buys the children from is one Kanu Izere, native of Ibom, Aro Division. Kanu in turn sells them at Akunakuna.

49. *Nwafor Nwagbara of Ibom, Aro Division, Ibo*: Now living at Akuna, Ohafia. Obtains children from the villages of Ngodo and Amuda, Okigwe Division. Sells them to people of Umon, Aro Division. Is building a large house at Ibom.

50. *Ofan of Ibom, Aro Division, Ibo*: Boy to Nwafor Nwagbara (see No. 49). Now with Nwafor at Akuna Ohafia. Assists Nwafor in selling the children.

51. *Kalu Obuka of Ibom, Aro Division, Ibo*: Boy to Ngwu Obuka (see No. 36). Brings children from Amachara and hands them to Ngwu. At times sells them on behalf of Ngwu at Uburu, Afikpo Division.

52. *Okereke Iboko of Ubo, Aro Division, Ibo*: Buys children at Uburu, Afikpo Division, and takes them to Akpuoha, Afikpo Division, for resale.

APPENDIX 6

PROCEEDINGS IN THE CASE OF NNADI OF UMUNKWOR

IN THE PROVINCIAL COURT OF THE PROVINCE OF OWERRI
IN THE PROVINCIAL COURT OF THE DISTRICT OF OKIGWI

NNADI (M) of Umunkwor, Okigwi District.

Stands charged before the Court for that he in or about the months of April or May (1933) in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and thirty three, did commit the following offence:-

Statement of Offence

(i) Slave dealing (ii) and pawning a child, Contra. Section 369 (1) and (3) Cap 21 Laws of Nigeria. (iii) Child Stealing Contra. Section 371. Cap 21 Laws of Nigeria.

Particulars of Offence

- (1) That Nnadi did about the month of April or May, 1933 forcibly or fraudulently take away the child Nwanichuku (being under 12 years of age) with intent to deprive the mother of the said Nwanichuku of her possession.
- (2) That the said Nandi did subsequently pawn the said child Nwanichuku, and or did otherwise deal in her as a slave.

and in the presence and hearing of the said Nnadi

- (1) Nwaihuaku F.
- (2) Nwaihim M.

Source: NNAE, Rivprof 9/1/320, OW 2366, Nnadi of Umunkwor, Okigwi District, charged with Slave Dealing, Pawning a Child and Child Stealing.

(3) Maduakolam M.

(4) Abuba M.

(5) P.C. No. 3151. Stephen Emeruom.

depose on oath as follows:

Firstly Ihuaku (f) S/S. I am a native of Anghana, where I live at present. I was first married to Abuba of Anghana; to whom I bore 5 children, 3 of whom have died. I quarrelled with Abuba, he asked me to re-marry so that I could pay back the dowry. The accused Nnadi offered to marry me but broke his word. I lived with Nnadi for a time but did not bear him any children. Accused Nnadi suggested we should go and live at Nkwerri; he left me after this for a long time, about 8 days, when he returned I asked him whether he had been able to raise the dowry money to pay to Chief Abuba. Finally I went to my own home with my child (by Abuba) whom I had taken with me. Nnadi did not accompany me. When I was sleeping with the mother of the accused, Nnadi came and whispered to his mother asking her to let him have the child. His mother gave him the child while I was sleeping. Next day I told Abuba that Nnadi had taken away the child; I also came into Okigwi and reported to the District Officer. The District Officer gave me a policeman who arrested Nnadi, and several other persons whom Nnadi pointed out as having helped him take away the child. This now the tenth month since this happened. The District Officer advised Abuba to take out a warrant of arrest in the native court against the accused for return of the child. Abuba took out this suit against accused and his mother. The Court ordered return of the child, Nnadi has not yet returned the child. The court sentenced him to 6 months I.H.L; he appealed and was given further time by the District Officer to find and produce the child. He has not yet produced the child. I understand now that the mother of the accused by name Izuokwu or Nwelekwara represented herself to be the mother of the child, and sold the child by name Nwanichukwu (f) to two men whose names I do not know.

In answer to questions by Nnadi

(1) I lived with you for about five years.

(2) I bore you no children.

By Court. (1) The child has not yet been found

(2) The child was about a year old when I went to Nandi's house, where I stayed five years.

Read over and found correct.

Ihuaku Her X Mark

[N. B. This witness is excessively stupid, and Loquacious.]

Taken and sworn before me at Okigwi 19–1–34

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop

A.D.O.

(Sgd.) L. N. Ebere.

Witness to mark.

Secondly NWIHIM (M) S/S. I am a native of Umunkwor. About 9 months ago a woman called Ihuaku came before the District Officer and made a complaint that a man called Nnadi had stolen her child. When arrested, Nnadi said that two men UFORJI and NWORIE were also concerned in the stealing of the child, together with an Aro man named Jeremiah. I went with the Policeman when he arrested Nnadi, Nworie, Jeremiah and an Aro woman named Ugo. I was present at the District Officer's Office when the accused were told to go home and Abuba of Anghana was advised to take a summons in the Umuduru Native Court against Nnadi for return of the child. Nnadi asked me to accompany him to Amuzari to find the man to whom he had sold the child; when we got there we could not find the man (named Paul). We told Paul's brothers, Obassi and Okereke, that Nnadi was willing to refund to Paul the £30 that Nnadi had received for the child, and begged them to get in touch with their brother. At last we found Paul who said he was unable to return the child, since he had already sold her to someone else. After this we returned home; and Nnadi was detained in Umuduru Native Court and eventually sentenced to imprisonment for failing to produce the child: He appealed; and was given further time to find the child: He has not produced the child up to now.

No relevant questions by Accused.

Read over and found correct Nwihim His X Mark

Taken & sworn before me at Okigwi 20–1–34

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop

A.D.O.

(Sgd.) L. N. Ebere.

Witness to mark.

Thirdly MADU-AKOLAM S/S. I am a native of Anghana. The child in question NWANICHUKWU belongs to Abuba. The woman Ihuaku mother of the child is my sister. My sister eventually left Abuba, by consent, and went to live with Nnadi the accused. After a long time Nnadi stole Abuba's child which Ihuaku had with her. Nnadi and Ihuaku had separated before this. Nnadi has not

refunded dowry on Ihuaku to Abuba. He has not yet produced the child though ordered to do so by Court.

In answer to question by Court. (1) I know Nnadi stole the child because he has failed to produce it since.

No questions by Accused.

Read over and found correct. Madu-Akolam His X Mark

(Sgd.) L. N. Ebere.

Witness to mark.

Taken and sworn before me at Okigwi 20–1–34

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop A.D.O.

Fourthly ABUBA S/S. I am Onye-isi-ala-uku of Anghana. I married the first witness Ihuaku from her girlhood. She had four children by me. Two of her children died in my house. About nine years ago there was a quarrel between herself and me and as a result of that she left my house. I thought she had gone to the house of her brother Maduako, but when I went there I could not find her. I learnt that accused had taken the woman away; I summonsed accused before Umuduru Native Court. This would be about eight or nine years ago. Accused was ordered by the Native Court to pay me £33, to take the woman, and give back my children who were with the woman. The sum ordered was the equivalent of the dowry I had originally paid for the woman. The woman was however permitted by the Court to keep her sucking child. I never received the £33 (except £2 paid by the chief of Accused's town); Nnadi eventually left the woman; and the child, when it was old enough was not given to me. I have taken him to Court several times, and he has served various terms of imprisonment. All this time the child was staying with Nnadi's mother. Eventually when Nnadi found he could not pay the money ordered, he went to his mother's house by night, stole the child and sold it. The mother of the child came and reported this to me. I advised her to report such a serious matter to the District Officer. The woman went to the Dist. Officer and came back with a policeman. Nnadi and other men were then arrested and brought before the District Officer. I was advised to summons Nnadi in the Native Court for the return of the child. Accused asked the court for eight days, in which time he thought his mother might be able to find the child who had been taken to Amuzari, the 8 days was granted but accused still failed to produce the child. Finally he was sent to prison for 6 months. On appeal; Nnadi was granted further time to find the child. Nnadi could still produce no money and no child. He asked to be allowed to go personally to find the child. However he made no attempt to do so. He was brought before the District Officer and said that he would again try to look for the child. The District Officer gave him a further 10 days to find the child; though Nnadi asked for a month. On the expiration of the 10 days Nnadi told the District Officer that the child

was in the custody of the Compound-head NWIHIM (Second witness). This was found to be a lie, however. It is now about eight or nine months since the mother of the child came to report to me that the child had been stolen.

In answer to questions by Accused.

- (1) You took the woman yourself, I did not send her to you.
- (2) You did not take the woman actually from my house: You picked her when we had quarrelled and she was not at the time in my house.
- (3) I do not know whether the woman has borne you any child since she has been living with you.

Read over and found correct. (Sgd.) Abuba

Taken and sworn before me at Okigwi 20–1–34

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop
A.D.O.

Fifthly Stephen Emeruem 1st c/c No. 3151 S/S. On the fourth of this month Nnadi came and made a report that his child had disappeared. I was asked to go with Nnadi in order to find out where the child was. When we got to Amuzari Nnadi said he could not find the child because he had given him to a man called Paul for £5. Nnadi told me that Nwihim was one of the people who took away the child. Nwihim was brought into Okigwi where he made a statement that Nnadi had pawned the child, and that he himself did not know anything about the mater. I then arrested Nnadi, cautioned him, and charged him with child-stealing. That is all I know.

In answer to questions by Accused. (1) Nwihim took you and myself to the house of one Paul.

- (2) We did not see Obassi and we did not see Paul.

Read over found correct.

(Sgd.) Stephen

Taken and sworn before me at Okigwi 20–1–34

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop

A.D.O.

Nnadi, accused, electing to make a statement on oath S/S.

I am a native of Umunkwor. About 12 years ago I married a woman named Ihuaku, the first witness. At that time my father was alive. In those days I had money and was looking for a woman to marry; Onuoha, Azurike and Uforji brought the first witness to me. I gave £20 dowry to Maduakolam (third witness), who said he was the father of the woman. He told me that she had

previously been the wife of chief Abuba. The woman did not bring any child to my house. I paid Maduakolam, who swore juju that he had a right to give the woman away, the money. The woman later conceived and bore a female child to me. After three months the child died. She conceived again, after she had been married to me for two years. Abuba then took me to court for dowry on my wife, who had formerly been his wife. He made a claim of £35, against me. I told him that I had already paid the dowry to Maduakolam. The case was tried in my absence. The case was reopened. Eventually I was imprisoned for three months. Two months after my release I was again tried, and again went to prison for three months. Sometime last year I pleaded to Maduako, to whom I had paid the money, to do what he could for me. I heard that Maduako had gone to live at Isiokpo. Abuba last year made another claim against me for £33. I would not pay the money, since I had already paid Maduako. I went to prison again for six months. I offered to return the child and the woman to Abuba, if only he would not press the claim for money. I again was arrested on a warrant; Nwihim my compound-head bailed me out. Nwihim advised me to pawn the child in order to obtain the money to pay Abuba. He also advised me to let Abuba have some money on "on account"; until I was able to arrange to pawn the child. I went to Oguta with the woman. Nwihim again advised me to pawn the child. Nwihim offered to find someone to take the child on pawn. Eventually he found Paul and brought him to me. I pawned the child to Paul; he gave me £5: in return for the child. He also said that if he did not get the principle [*sic*] back he would add £5 thereto by way of interest. The period of the pawn was to be one year. I took the money from him, and when I got home; I gave the money to Nwihim to pay to Abuba. Nwihim made use of the money and did not pay it over to Abuba. I paid him a further sum of £3. 15/-. He made use of this also. I asked him why he had done so; he said that he would now help me to recover the £20: I had paid to Maduako as dowry. He did not so help me. I took Nwihim to court and he was ordered to refund the £8. 15/- to me. He appealed and the judgment of the court was confirmed. Nwihim asked my brothers for return of £5: which he alleged was expenditure incurred on another account. My brothers refused to pay him £5: I obtained some money. Then I went to the District Officer to tell him that I had pawned my child but now had the money to redeem it, but that the pawnee would not agree to my redeeming it. I went with a policeman who questioned Nwihim. Nwihim took us to the house of one Obasi; but we did not see Obasi. Nwihim came into Okigwi; I accompanied the policeman and him. At Okigwi I was arrested. I have no witness to call. All I can say is that this case was tried before in the native court and judgment was given against me for 30 pounds, as I was unable to obtain any money I pawned the child, which is my own, in order to get the money to pay the debt. I pawned the child to Paul at Amuzari for 5 pounds. I do not know where Paul is.

Read over and found correct.

His
Nnadi X
Mark.

(Sgd.) L. N. Ebere.

Witness to mark.

Before me at Okigwi this 22–1–34.

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop

Asst: District Officer.

I certify that the above statement of the accused Nnadi was taken and sworn in my presence and hearing at Okigwi on the 22nd January 1934, and contains accurately the whole statement of the said accused.

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop

Asst: District Officer.

I certify that the above statement of Nnadi of Umunkwor Amuzari was given in Ibo and was correctly interpreted by me from Ibo into English and from English into Ibo. It was read over to the accused and he acknowledged it to be correct and made his mark thereto.

(Sgd.) L. N. Ebere.

Sworn Interpreter.

I certify that the above depositions of

- (1) Nwaihuaku. F
- (2) Nwaihim. M
- (3) Maduakolam. M
- (4) Abuba. M
- (5) P.C. No. 3151 Stephen Emeruom.

were rendered in Ibo and were correctly interpreted by me from Ibo into English and from English into Ibo. They were read over severally to the deponent [*sic*] who acknowledged their respective depositions to be correct and made their marks thereto.

(Sgd.) L. N. Ebere.

Sworn Interpreter.

Under authority of section 69 Cap 20 Laws of Nigeria the accused *Nnadi* of Umunkwor Amuzari is committed for trial to the Provincial Court of Owerri

Province presided over by the Resident in charge of Owerri Province or by any other member of the Provincial Court of Owerri Province exercising the full powers of a Provincial Court.

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop

Asst. District Officer.

22nd January 1934.

In accordance with Section 72 Cap 20 laws of Nigeria the accused was informed of the privilege offered to him under this section; but did not desire to avail himself thereof.

(Sgd.) I. R. P. Heslop

Asst. District Officer.

22nd January 1934.

Certified true Copy.

I. R. P. Heslop

Asst. District Officer

APPENDIX 7

PROCEEDINGS IN THE CASE OF OSU AJOKU OF OGWA

OWERRI PROVINCE

In the Provincial Court holden at Owerri this 2nd day of September 1933 before K. V. Hanitsch Esqr, District Officer with the full power of Resident in charge of a Province by commission dated the 23rd of December 1932

Rex

Versus

Osu Ajoku of N.H. about 35.

Statement of Offence

Child stealing contra. Section 371 C.C.

Particulars of offence

That Osu Ajoku of Ogwa did on or about the 15th day of March 1935 unlawfully steal or receive a small girl called Nenaya aged about 4 years, at or near Ogwa Owerri Division.

Interpreter Eke.

Plea. Not Guilty.

1. 1st witness sworn. I am a native of Amanduba, and onye-isi of Amanduba. I have been a warrant chief of Orlu Native court for eleven years. Six months ago I was in my house when a man called Ahagara of Amanduba came to my house and told me something. I sent my boy John to bring accused and the child in question. My boy returned with accused and his mother and this small girl. I asked Osu whether he was related to the girl. He said no. I asked how

Source: NNAE, Rivprof 9/1/263, OW 1955, Rex vs Osu Ajoku of Ogwa, charged with Child Stealing.

he had got the girl. He said he had stolen it with another man, whose name he would not give me. He said he would give the man's name when he returned to Ogwa to Chief Worie's house. He would not say much about it to me. I sent a message to Chief Worie, who sent his boys. I handed accused and the girl to the boys to take to Worie. The father of the child whom I did not know before, accompanied Worie's boys to my house. He asked accused. "What did I do to you?" He begged the father that he was poor and had nothing to live on and therefore stole the girl.

By accused.

Q. When I was taken to your house did I not say I was not going to sell the girl, and I told you her father's name?

A. No.

2. 2nd witness sworn. I am Ihemtuga, native of Ogwa, father of this small girl Nenaya, who is about 4 years old. This happened about 7 months ago. The mother of the girl divorced me last year and she used to sleep with me. On the night of Afo next day being Nkwo, my intended wife did not come. My two children Nenaya and Ebere Nihu slept in the same room with me. About the middle of the night I left my house to go to find my intended wife, Iheoma, daughter of Njoku. I went to Njoku's house but did not find Iheoma there. I returned home. I made fire. I did not see Nenaya there. She was missing Ebere Nihu was alone. Neither of them can speak. I and my family looked for her till dawn. Then I reported to Chief Worie. Young boys were sent out to make inquiries. There was no success either that day or next day Eke. Then a message came to Chief Worie and we went to Ikejefor's house and I found my daughter. This accused was said to have taken her. He said "It was Obassi who handed the child to me." Obassi is dead; he died in prison. Obassi is a native of my compound. I had a dispute with Obassi as [he] was trying to entice my wife, who is now dead. Accused is the brother of a girl Iheoma whom I married from Ohuboo.

By accused.

Q. Did you not bring Nenaya to my place on the night of Afo?

A. Why should I? I did not.

By accused.

Q. You had a serious palaver with Wobassi?

A. Yes. He stole my wife and she died in his house. I have not had the dowry back.

Q. Why should Wobassi steal your child?

A. I see no reason except accused said so.

Q. Who was Nenaya's mother?

A. Omaseridiya.

Q. Where is she now?

A. She is at Amazari. She has left me. But she did not go to Wobassi. The wife who went to [W]obassi is Ogwualo. [S]he is dead.

Q. So Wobassi had no reason to steal your child but you had enmity for him?

A. I have enmity for him.

3. 3rd witness sworn. I am Wolu native of Ogwa, married at Amanduba to Wiwu. The accused is my brother. About 7 months ago I had a child. One evening my mother said she would return to her town. I prepared food for my children and bathed the baby. Osu the accused, sleeps in the next room to me. I heard a voice calling "Osu, Osu," he replied "who is that?" The voice replied "it is Obassi." Obassi then came in and handed a child to the accused, and said "Take this." Next morning I saw the child and it was the child of Ihemtuga, who married my sister. I sent a message to my mother, to come at once and the daughter of my brother in law. I also sent a message to Chief Ikejofor to come and see what I saw there.

By court.

Q. Did you see Obassi?

A. Yes.

Q. With your own eyes?

A. Yes. I saw him.

Q. What doing?

A. I saw him bring the child to the door way and say "Keep this child for me."

Q. Your door?

A. The door leading to the room where Osu slept.

Q. You say you saw Obassi with your own eyes?

A. Yes.

Q. Then why did you reply to accused at the preliminary investigation that you did not see but heard him speak and knew who it was?

A. He did not ask me so.

(This differs from the record at the preliminary investigation)

There is no need for accused to cross examine this witness, whose evidence is unreliable.

4. 4th witness sworn. I am Ekeoma, native of Ogwa married to the late Njoku at Ogwa. Accused is my son. I have no palaver with my son. I went to [O]boro compound of Ogwa, where a relative of mine died. I went to [W]olu's house, my daughter. When I got there I did not see her small daughter Adaji. I asked where she was. Wolu told me she had sent Adaji to me tell me something. Osu has a room under the same roof as Wolu but was not in. Nenaya was there with some other little girl. Nobody was looking after her. This was on Orié day, about this time (about 1 p.m.). A report was made to chief Ikejefor. I saw Osu that same day. He said Obassi had brought the child to him. He did not say what for.

By court.

Q. Had you not heard that this child was missing?

A. No.

Q. Why should Obassi take Ithemtuga's child?

A. I do not know.

Q. Obassi has no reason for hatred of Ithemtuga, but Ithemtuga has much reason for hatred of Obassi, who stole his wife?

A. Yes.

Q. I suggest to you that it is not impossible that Ithemtuga took this child to accused and told him to say it was Obassi brought it, so as to get accused into trouble.

A. Obassi took it to accused. Ithemtuga first arrested Obassi and later arrested Osu.

Q. How much later?

A. The same day.

By accused.

Q. You say Obassi brought the child to me? Did you see him or did somebody tell you?

A. I heard it but did not see with my eyes.

Q. Who told you?

A. Accused said so.

By accused.

Q. Are you living in the same room as me, to know that Obassi brought the child to me?

A. No.

5. 5th witness sworn. I am No. 4459 3rd class police constable Albert Moh, native of Awka, stationed at Owerri. I was in the police office when the accused was brought in. A complaint was made against him. He was charged with child stealing. He was cautioned.

By court.

Q. In what words?

A. I said "Osu, I caution you for having stolen this child from one Ihemtuga. You are not bound to say anything but anything you may say to me may be given in evidence against you at your trial." He made a statement which was taken down in writing. I recognize this as the statement (Exhibit "A").

(Exhibit "A" read to accused)

By accused.

Q. Was that what I said to you?

A. Yes, and I wrote it down.

(Accused denies that the statement contains what he said)

Adj.

(Sgd.) K. V. Hanitsch

D.O.

2/9/33

Resumed 4/9/33.

6. 6th witness sworn. I am Worie Oginibe of Ogwa, Onye-isi of Ogwa and a court member.

One morning I was in my house when Ihemtuga came to me and reported that his child had been stolen. I blamed him and asked him what he had been doing when the child was stolen. He said he left his house before dawn, at first cock crow and had gone out to tap his palm wine.

By court.

Q. Are you quite sure he said it was to tap palm wine?

A. Yes, and when he got back he found the child had been stolen.

So I sent young men out to look for this child. This was the very morning; that he had reported the loss of the child, which he said occurred during the night just ended. That same day I got a message from Chief Ikejiofor asking if my town people had missed a child. So I sent my boys to see what child had been found. They returned with the accused Osu, and the child in question which

was the child of Ihemtuga. Osu was brought before me and he was questioned as to who handed the child to him. He said it was Obassi. Obassi was there and denied all knowledge of the stealing of the child. Osu and Obassi argued with one another before me. I had to give orders that Osu should be tied up with rope, so that he should explain better who handed him the child. Osu still maintained it was Obassi who handed him the child. I asked him why the child had been handed to him. He said Obassi asked him to go and sell the child for him. So I said the two of them should be taken to Owerri to explain themselves.

By court.

Q. What sort of pressure was put on Osu?

A. We tied him with that rope so that he would feel the pain and confess the truth.

Q. Did he say anything about Ihemtuga himself having taken the child to him?

A. No.

By accused.

Q. Did I not say it was Ihemtugah who brought the child to me in order to get rid of Obassi and get him into prison?

A. No. If you had said that we should not have tied up Obassi but turned to Ihemtuga.

Q. Was I not tied, my hands and legs together, and tied against a post, and you brought an insect to eat me saying I should accuse Obassi, and say it was he who brought the child to me.

A. Hey. You have no truth in you.

Q. Did you not first arrest Obassi and tie him up?

A. No.

Q. Was it not the very night he said he went to tap the wine, that he actually brought the child to me?

A. No. You were going to take the child away and were arrested.

A. Did you not put peppers in my eyes and say I should accuse Obassi, and threaten to pierce me with nails?

A. No. You are lying. None of your statements are true.

By court.

Q. Did accused ask any such question at the preliminary investigation?

- A. No. (The record of the proceeding at the preliminary investigation makes no mention of any such questions having been asked)
- Q. Did accused say anything about what he was going to do with the child and what reward he would get?
- A. I asked accused. He told me they were going to share the proceeds.

Accused, electing to give evidence sworn. I am Osu Ajoku native of Ogwa. On Afo night I was in my house asleep. I heard a knock on my door. I asked: "Who is that?" Somebody answered "It is me" and I opened the door. It was Ihemtuga. He came with this child Nenaya. I knew Ihemtuga. He married my younger sister Iheoma. I went and told Njoku my father, who is now dead, that Ihemtuga was in the house. My father asked him what he wanted and he said "Obassi has killed my wife. Let me leave this child here and when the child is searched for Obassi will be accused, and Obassi and Osu (that is myself) will be arrested. I went [sic] to get Obassi in prison. I will go and report to Worie that the child is missing."

My father said he should take back his child. I said he had better go home with his child as I was not to be drawn into this matter of enmity between him and his relative Obassi. He said if I should say Obassi had brought the child to me he would give me £3.10.0. I said I would not agree and that he had not finished paying the dowry on my sister. He told me that when I was arrested I should say that Obassi had sworn me with a juju called Ezala Oji and an Otisi juju. I said I would not agree, and that if the child stayed there for a year, she would be there, but I wouldn't do what he asked. He said "it is now day. This is almost my house as I am related to you in marriage. I cannot take the child back in broad daylight. Let her stay with you." He said his sister could bring the child with her when she returned to his house. (She was to return to Ihemtuga's house the next Afor Day)

I told him I was going to visit another sister of mine, who had had a baby, and that his wife, my sister Iheoma, wasn't there as she had gone to visit an elder sister, Welu (one of the witness in this case).

He said that as soon as he got back he would send out all the young men to look for his child.

As my mother and sister were not there and as I was going to visit Wolu, I took the child with me.

Ikejiofor of Amanduba and his people then came to me and said Ihemtuga was looking for his child. They took me to Ikejiofor's house. I told him the child was my brother in law's, Ihemtuga's. Ikejiofor sent his boys to warn Chief Worie that he had got me in his house with the missing child. Worie sent his boys who came and arrested me and took me to Ogwa. They beat me. I asked if they had ever seen a man who stole his brother-in-law's child. They took me before Chief Worie. All the men and women of the family were present and were beating me. They said I should say Obassi brought

the child to me. I said it was Ihemtuga. They said I should not say that. I was bleeding from the ear, and got a black eye and had to be treated by the doctor; for not agreeing that it was Obasi who brought the child to me. They tied me and Obasi and brought us to Owerri. They said if I did not say it was Obasi who brought the child to me, I would be taken to the police and beaten to death. I was beaten even by the labourers on the road. I have been in Prison for 7 months. My father Njoku died while I was in the Prison.

Q. With all this alleged beating, did you say it was Obasi who brought the child to you?

A. No.

Q. You took the child from Njoku, your father's house to Wolu's house?

A. Yes. Wolu had just delivered and my mother was not at home.

Q. How far from Njoku's house to Wolu's house?

From here to the House settlement (about 1¼ miles)

Q. The child was brought to you during the night and the very next day you were arrested.

A. Yes.

Q. Did you agree or not with Ihemtuga's proposal?

A. I did not agree.

Q. Then why didn't you instead of taking the child with you to Wolu's house, take the child straight back to Ihemtuga or to some Chief?

A. He said the child should remain with us till my sister Iheoma returned to him next Afo day.

Q. How many days do you mean?

A. Four days. But in the 3rd day I was arrested.

Q. If your story is true, and you kept the child at all, Ihemtuga would at once start the plot against Obasi, and you would get caught with the child?

Why should you place yourself in such a position?

A. I did not expect to be accused of stealing my brother in law's child.

Q. The child was in your possession how long?

A. Afor. Child brought to my house.

Nkwo. I went fishing.

Eke. I went to Wolu's house.

Orie. I was arrested.

Q. How far from Ihemtuga's house to your house?

A. (Indicates) a mile.

Q. You had the child in your possession two days and two nights?

A. Yes.

Q. According to your story, you knew Ihemtuga wished to charge Obassi with stealing his child?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you or did you not agree to these alleged proposals to make a false charge against Obassi?

A. No. I did not agree.

Q. Can you give me explanation, then for keeping the child two days and nights?

A. As I did not agree with his suggestions, he said the girl should remain, and return with his wife, my sister.

Q. Why should he not prefer it to be returned at once or take it back himself?

A. Because I was related to him by marriage.

Q. If your story is true, why did not Ihemtuga try and prevent your being arrested and only Obassi arrested?

A. People were beating me. He asked that I might be released but Worie said no.

Q. Why were they beating you?

A. Because I did not agree with their suggestion to name Obassi as the stealer of the child.

Q. Who was the person who according to your story was most anxious for Obassi to get into trouble?

A. Ihemtuga.

Q. And yet when you refused to mention Obassi, Ihemtuga asked for you to be released?

A. Yes;

Q. Why? Wouldn't he be more likely to say the opposite?

A. He said that until such time as I agree that it was Obassi, I should be held fast.

Q. But only a few minutes ago you told me he asked for you to be released?

A. Yes, I said so. But the other people did not agree with him. When he came first he said they should not tie me up but I should explain to them who handed the child to me.

Ihemtuga recalled, re-sworn.

By court.

Q. How far from your house to Obassi's

A. (Indicates) about 30 yards

Q. Anybody else sleeping with the 2 children that night?

A. Nobody.

Q. If they woke up and cried, who was meant to look after them?

A. My other wife, who was living in her own house.

Q. How far is that?

A. About 10 yards (indicated).

Q. Did you ask for accused to be loosed or not arrested?

A. No.

By accused.

Q. Was it not you who gave me food that day?

A. No. Why should I?

Q. Was it not prepared in your house?

A. No.

Q. Where was it prepared?

A. I know nothing about it. You stole my child; why should I help you at all.

Q. Did you not bring me yam in your pocket to the barrack here?

A. No. You are lying.

The accused is asked if he has any witness to call. He says "My witness is my father and he is dead."

By court.

Q. You had the child for 2 whole days. If you had it without evil intentions, there must be persons who can say they saw you with it and that you

explained that you were not stealing the child. Are there no witnesses of that sort?

A. No.

Finding. Guilty.

The accused is asked whether he has anything to say in mitigation of sentence

He says, "I have never sold a child before. This is my brother in law and I could not have done such a thing."

Adjourned for a consideration of sentence.

4/9/33

(Sgd.) K. V. Hanitsch

D.O.

Resumed 5/9/33.

Accused is asked what sort of man was Obassi. He replies "He was an older man than I and richer, and bigger. He is a free born. My own father and mother were osu (slaves)."

No previous convictions

Sentence 4 years I. H. L.

5/9/33

(Sgd.) K. V. Hanitsch

D.O.

With full powers of a Resident

1/c Province by Commission dated

the 23rd of December 1932.

Certified true copy of 13 pages

Exhibit "A"

In case Rex versus Osu Ajoku

(Sgd.) K. V. Hanitsch D.O. 2/9/33

Statement 15th March 1933

Cautioned before statement

Osu Njoku of Ogwa here states:- About (6) six days ago I went to my in-law's house named Ihemtuge of Umualusi Ogwa, there I met one Obassi of the above Umualusi compound, who told me that he went to my house but could not get me at home, and next day being Orié I was in the house when he came to me, with some jujus of Otusi and Ezealaoji, and sworn me as follows, "This thing which he would bring to me to keep for him if I dare to tell it any

human being or person let those jujus kill me.” While he was swearing me I then asked why he should swear me for unseen article or thing, he said that [he] knew his reason of swearing in such a way and if I am not sworn in such a manner no doubt I would proof of the sercrite [*sic*], he sworn me and went away, the following day midnight he brought to my house the girl named Nenaya a daughter of my in-law the said Ihemtuga, to this I said is this the reason of swearing me that I should keep what you asked me to keep for you? He said yes, He left the girl in my house and went away. I thought over this the remaining hour of the night till morning when I related the hole [*sic*] story to my sister by name Wolu who was at home with me, because my mother has gone to Oburo Ogwa. Our mother returned yesterday and we told her what happened in her absence. I belong to Umuosudurueke Ogwa but I am residing at Umuona Mbarowerri Ogwa, at my sister’s house.

NOTES

Preface

1. The “Eastern Province” was the easternmost of the three administrative divisions into which the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria (1906–13) was divided. It took in much of what later became the “Eastern Provinces,” but not all. The term “Eastern Provinces” refers to four of the provinces of the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, which Lugard created in the process of the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914. These provinces lay east of the River Niger and were made up of Calabar, Ogoja, Onitsha, and Owerri. In 1956, these four provinces became the Eastern Region of Nigeria.

Chapter 1

1. C. Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade* (London: Longman, 1949); R. Coupland, *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*, 2nd ed. (London: Frank Cass, 1964); E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1964); A. Mackenzie-Grieve, *The Last Years of the English Slave Trade, Liverpool, 1750–1807*. (London: Putnam, 1941).

2. M. Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 22–23.

3. *Ibid.*, 3.

4. A. Burns, *History of Nigeria*, 8th ed. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978), 21.

5. *Ibid.*, 217.

6. W. I. Ofonagoro, “Aspects of British Colonial Policy in Southern Nigeria: The Problems of Forced Labour and Slavery, 1895–1928,” in *Studies in Southern Nigerian History*, ed. B. I. Obichere (London: Frank Cass, 1982), 29.

7. T. N. Tamuno, *The Evolution of the Nigerian State: The Southern Phase 1898–1914* (London: Longman, 1972), ix–x.

8. *Ibid.*, 6–7.

9. *Ibid.*, 10.

10. K. K. Nair, *Politics and Society in South Eastern Nigeria 1841–1906* (London: Frank Cass, 1972), 215.

11. J. C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885–1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), chaps. 2, 3, 4, and 5.

12. S. Attoe, *A Federation of the Biase People: Origin and Development of Biase Ethnicity 1750–1950* (Enugu: Harris Publishers Ltd., 1990).

13. R. O. Ekundare, *An Economic History of Nigeria 1860–1960* (London: Methuen, 1973), 33–34.
14. M. Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 121–22.
15. E. Isichei, *A History of Nigeria* (London: Longman, 1983), 424.
16. H. C. Metz, ed., *Nigeria: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Area Handbook Series, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1993), 24.
17. Coupland, *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*, 240–41.
18. K. O. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830–1885* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 18.
19. *Ibid.*, 18.
20. *Ibid.*, 61–67.
21. Burns, *History of Nigeria*, 111–14.
22. Dike, *Trade and Politics*, 47.
23. *Ibid.*; Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*; Nair, *Politics and Society*; Burns, *History of Nigeria*, 111–14.
24. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, chap. 3; Dike, *Trade and Politics*, 218; A. E. Afigbo, “Southeastern Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century,” in *History of West Africa*, ed. J. F. A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1988).
25. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, 60.
26. *Ibid.*, 318.
27. T. F. Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (London: John Murray, 1839), 299–302.

Chapter 2

1. G. I. Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), chap. 6; A. E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria 1891–1929* (London: Longman, 1972), chap. 2; Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, chap. 2.
2. Afigbo, “Southeastern Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century.”
3. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, chaps. 4 and 5; Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, chap. 2; Afigbo, “Southeastern Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century.”
4. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, chap. 3; G. Jones, *Domestic Slavery in West Africa* (London, 1975), 49–50.
5. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, chaps. 3 and 4.
6. National Archives of Great Britain, Kew, London (formerly known as the Public Record Office, or PRO), F.O. 2/63, Despatches from the Niger Coast Protectorate, see Despatch of 19 August 1894, forwarding Report on the Administration of the Niger Coast Protectorate from Its Inauguration in August 1891.
7. PRO, F.O. 2/108, Despatches from the Niger Coast Protectorate, see no. 151 of 1 September 1898, with enclosure; F.O. 2/84, Despatches from the Niger Coast Protectorate to the Foreign Office, see Conf. 219 of 20 August 1895, with Annual Report for 1894–95 enclosed.
8. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta*, chap. 11; J. E. Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), chap. 2; C. C. Ifemesia, “British Enterprise on the Niger 1832–1869,” PhD diss., University of London, 1959; D. Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991).

9. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta*, chap. 11; Flint, *Sir George Goldie*, chap. 2.
10. E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842–1914* (London: Longman, 1966), chap. 3; Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers*, 84–85.
11. Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, 39–40.
12. O. Ikime, *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1968), 187–88; A. E. Afigbo, “Trade and Politics on the Cross River 1895–1905,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 8, no. 1 (1972).
13. Jones, *Trading States of the Oil Rivers*, 83–87; J. F. A. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841–1891: The Making of a New Elite* (London: Longman, 1965); Ayandele, *Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria*.
14. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, 311; Nair, *Politics and Society*, chaps. 6 and 7; Afigbo, “Trade and Politics on the Cross River.”
15. Afigbo, “Southeastern Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century”; A. E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture* (Ibadan: University Press, Ltd., 1981); Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, chaps. 5 and 6.
16. Dike, *Trade and Politics*, 87; Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, 27; Nair, *Politics and Society*, 81–82.
17. C. Partridge, *Cross River Natives* (London: Hutchinson, 1905); H. Goldie, *Calabar and Its Missions* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1890); D. M. MacFarlan, *Calabar: The Church of Scotland Mission* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946); J. C. Anene, *The International Boundaries of Nigeria 1885–1960* (London: Longman, 1970).
18. G. I. Jones, “The Political Organization of Old Calabar,” in *Efik Traders of Old Calabar*, ed. D. Forde (London: International African Institute, 1956); Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta*, 156–59; Ayandele, *Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria*, 16–26.
19. Nair, *Politics and Society*, 82.
20. *Ibid.*, 81.
21. PRO, C.O. 520/12, Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Colonial Office, see Despatch of 7 July 1901.
22. PRO, F.O. 2/85, Despatches from the Niger Coast Protectorate to the Foreign Office, see Conf. Despatch dated 17 December 1895.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. PRO, F.O. 2/101, Despatches from the Niger Coast Protectorate to the Foreign Office, see Despatch no. 67 of 20 August 1896.
27. PRO, C.O. 520/12, Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Colonial Office, see Despatch of 7 July 1901.
28. *Ibid.*; K. O. Dike and F. Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-east Nigeria 1650–1980* (Ibadan, University Press Ltd, 1990).
29. PRO, F.O. 2/85, Africa (West Coast) Niger Coast etc., see Despatch of 26 October 1895.
30. PRO, F.O. 2/84, Despatches from the Niger Coast Protectorate to the Foreign Office, see Conf. 219 of 20 August 1895, with Annual Report for 1894–95 enclosed.
31. PRO, F.O. 2/85, Africa (West Coast) Niger Coast etc., see Despatch of 29 October 1895.
32. PRO, C.O. 520/8, Southern Nigeria Despatches, vol. 2 (May–August 1901), see Despatch no. 220 of 5 August 1901, with enclosure.
33. PRO, C.O. 520/12, Southern Nigeria Despatches etc., see Despatch of 7 July 1901.

Chapter 3

1. A. E. Afigbo, “The Nineteenth Century Crisis of the Aro Slaving Oligarchy,” *Nigeria Magazine* (Lagos), nos. 110–12.
2. Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, 33–34.
3. Oral information collected in the early 1960s from elders from the different parts of the former Eastern Nigeria.
4. PRO, C.O. 520/8, Southern Nigeria Despatches, see Despatch no. 220 of 5 August 1901, from L. Probyn (Acting High Commissioner), especially the enclosed extract from a report by the Acting Divisional Commissioner, Cross River Division, Richard Morrissey, on Cross River Slave Markets.
5. Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*, 33–34.
6. Nigerian National Archives, Ibadan (NNAI), C.S.O. 1/13, Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Foreign and Colonial Offices, vol. 2 of 1899, see Despatch no. 167 of 3 October 1899.
7. Nigerian National Archives, Enugu (NNAE), Calprof 10/3, vol. 2, Reports, see Report no. 6 of 23 June 1901, from D.C. Eket.
8. NNAI, C.S.O. 1/13, Despatches, see extract from Quarterly Report on Opobo for Quarter ended 30 June 1899.
9. P.R.O., C.O. 520/8, Southern Nigeria Despatches, see despatch no. 520 of 5 August 1901, enclosing extract from a report by the Acting Divisional Commissioner, Cross River Division, Richard Morrissey, on Cross River Slave Markets; PRO C.O. 520/12, Southern Nigeria Despatches, see Moor’s despatch of 7 July 1901 on the Slavery Question.
10. Ikime, *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta*, 68.
11. On this subject and for our area of interest, see *ibid.*, and Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, chaps. 2 and 3.
12. J. C. Anene, “The Southern Nigeria Protectorate and the Aros 1900–1902,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (hereafter *JHSN*) 1 (1956): 20–26.
13. *Ibid.*
14. PRO, C.O. 520/24, Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Colonial Office, see Despatch no. 2 of 4 January 1904.
15. PRO, C.O. 520/36, Southern Nigeria Despatches etc., see Southern Nigeria Conf. of 9 June 1906 and attachments, especially the military report by Major Trenchard.
16. PRO, C.O. 520/12, Southern Nigeria Despatches etc., see Despatch of 7 July 1901 on the issue of slavery.
17. *Southern Nigeria Government Gazette*, no. 23, 12 December 1901, 440.
18. *Ibid.*
19. NNAI, C.S.O. 1/13, Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Foreign and Colonial Offices, 1901, see Despatch no. 381 of 4 November 1901, with Memorandum of Instructions attached.
20. See Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*; Anene, “The Southern Nigeria Protectorate and the Aros”; G. I. Jones, “Who are the Aros?” *Nigerian Field* 8, no. 3 (1939); A. E. Afigbo, “The Aro Expedition of 1901: An Episode in the British Occupation of Iboland,” *Odu, A Journal of West African Studies*, new series no. 7 (1972); A. E. Afigbo, “The Eclipse of the Aro Slaving Oligarchy 1901–1927,” *JHSN* 6, no. 1 (1971); Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*.

21. NNAI, C.S.O. 1/3, Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Colonial Office, see Despatch no. 361 of 9 July 1903 and the attached reports on the expedition.
22. P. A. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), vol. 1.
23. NNAI, C.S.O. 1/3, Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Colonial Office, see no. 361 of 29 July 1903 and attachments.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Order of 26 November 1901 on Proclamation no. 5 of 1901, published in the *Southern Nigeria Government Gazette*, no. 23, 12 December 1901.
26. Afigbo, “The Eclipse of the Aro Slaving Oligarchy.”
27. E. A. Ayandele, *Nigerian Historical Studies* (London: Frank Cass, 1979), chap. titled “The Collapse of Pagandom in Igboland,” especially 171.
28. PRO, C.O. 520/12, Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Colonial Office, see Despatch of 7 July 1901. On the other details of the two proclamations on Native House Rule and the issue of Master and Servant, the reader is referred to Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*; Nair, *Politics and Society*; and Tamuno, *The Evolution of the Nigerian State*.
29. On other aspects of the Roads and Creeks (later Rivers) Proclamation, the reader is referred to the following works: Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*; Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*; and Nair, *Politics and Society*.
30. Afigbo, “The Eclipse of the Aro Slaving Oligarchy.”
31. NNAI, C.S.O. 1/13, Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Colonial Office, see Despatch no. 159 of 10 December 1897. See also PRO, C.O. 520/12, Despatch of 7 July 1901.
32. PRO, C.O. 520/12, Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Colonial Office, see Despatch of 7 July 1901 on the Currency Issue.
33. See *ibid.*, on the currency issue and its connection with the issue of abolishing the slave trade. It is not clear why these two very important despatches, one on the slavery question and the other on the currency issue, issued the same day and shown to be closely connected, were not given reference numbers.
34. “Ndi-Igbo, unlike most of their neighbours in Nigeria, were conquered in detail, practically village by village, by repeated British military expeditions and patrols; then their spiritual order was attacked, root and branch, by Christian missionaries who conquered Igbo religion using the bible and bonfire, blowing up sacred groves, burning religious artefacts, placing bans on oracles and their agents.” Chinweizu Chinweizu, “Aku-Agwu na Aku-mma: The Responsibilities of Wealth,” paper presented at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), Lagos, 18 November 1998, at a symposium on Ndi-Igbo in Contemporary Nigeria, organized by the Association of Anambra State Development Unions, Lagos.
35. PRO, C.O. 520/14, Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Colonial Office, see Gallwey’s Report enclosed in Despatch no. 164 of 18 April 1902. See also Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, 229; also information collected from the field in 1962.
36. W. I. Ofonagoro, *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria* (New York: Nok, 1979), 26–27.
37. D. Ohadike, “The Decline of Slavery among the Igbo People,” in *The End of Slavery in Africa*, ed. S. Miers and R. Roberts (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 448–49.
38. PRO, F.O. 2/108, Niger Coast Protectorate Despatches to the Foreign Office, see Despatch no. 163 of 11 October 1898, by Major Gallwey, Acting Commissioner and

Consul-General. On the punishment of the Qua Ibo, see PRO, C.O. 444/1, Niger Coast Protectorate Despatches, Conf. no. 71 of 14 May 1898, with Report of the Expedition attached.

39. PRO, F.O. 2/108, Niger Coast Protectorate Despatches to the Foreign Office, see Despatch no. 163 of 11 October 1898, by Major Gallwey, Acting High Commissioner and Consul-General.

40. A. E. Afigbo, “Nsukka Communities from Earliest Times to 1951,” in *The Nsukka Environment*, ed. G. E. K. Ofofata (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1979); also information from the field.

41. Information from the field. Unfortunately it was not possible to determine who indeed he was. Some informants said he was Mr. Weir, some Capt. Gerald Ambrose, others Mr. Cochrane.

42. Some among the British officers believed that the Aro, for instance, lived only by the slave trade. In his Political Report on the Aro Expedition, for instance, Gallwey wrote as follows: “The slave trade was practically the only trade known to or carried on by the Aros.” See his report attached to Despatch no. 184 of 18 April 1902, in PRO, C.O. 520/14, Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Colonial Office.

Chapter 4

1. PRO, C.O. 520/12, Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Colonial Office, see Despatch of 7 July 1901.

2. For more on this, see chapter 3.

3. PRO, C.O. 520/12, see Despatch of 7 July 1901; see also Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*; Nair, *Politics and Society*; and Tamuno, *The Evolution of the Nigerian State*.

4. For more information on Agbagwu, see B. W. Hodder and U. I. Ukwu, *Markets in West Africa* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1969), 135–36. Frank Hives, a one-time political officer in southeastern Nigeria, has left us a highly coloured pen picture of the Agbagwu market in session at Uzuakoli: “There were two markets in Uzuakoli—Uzuakoli and Akolinta (literally, the small market). The larger one was the principal market for many miles around. The system was for a market to be held every four days, the first occasion large, the second occasion small and so on until the seventh which was known as the 28th day market. This was the most important of them all, and natives would journey for four or five days under Aro protection in order to attend it. The 28th day market was a wonderful sight to see in full swing, with between five hundred and a thousand natives, men and women, gathered together to buy or sell. The huge crowd was in perpetual movement, a kaleidoscope of colour under the glaring sun, with the glittering black torsos contrasted against the multi-coloured cloths which hung from the waist to the ground.” *Justice in the Jungle* (London, 1932), 203–4.

5. NNAE, Calprof 10/3, Reports, see undated Report on the Appointment of R. K. Granville as D.C. for Bende.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. NNAE, Calprof 10/3, Reports, see Report of 10 June 1902, from Mr. Granville, enclosed in a letter from Mr. Morrissey to the Provincial Commissioner.

9. NNAE, Calprof 10/3, Reports, see Letter no. 9 of 12 June 1902, from Richard Morrisey, Acting Divisional Commissioner.
10. NNAE, Calprof 10/3, Reports, see Report on a Tour of the Cross River Division, dated 1 August 1902.
11. NNAE, Calprof 10/3, see Report by Major W. C. E. Heneker, Commanding Ibeku-Olokoro Expedition, dated 26 December 1902.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Afigbo, "The Eclipse of the Aro Slaving Oligarchy."
15. NNAE, Arodist 1/7/31, The Long Juju of Arochuku, see Conf. 136/1912, from H. Bedwell, Provincial Commissioner, Eastern Province.
16. Hives, *Justice in the Jungle*, F. Hives and G. Lumley, *Juju and Justice in Nigeria* (London: John Lane, 1930).
17. A. J. Fox, *Uzuakoli: A Short History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 2.
18. Ibid., 13.
19. Ibid., 16.
20. Ibid.
21. NNAI, C.S.O. 1/13, Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Colonial Office, see no. 162 of 10 October 1898.
22. NNAI, C.S.O. 1/13, Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Colonial Office, see no. 27 of 16 January 1902.
23. NNAI, C.S.O. 1/13, see no. 27 of 16 January 1902.
24. NNAE, Arodist 1/7/73, Minute no. P.M. 3402/03 of 12 October 1910, by the Acting High Commissioner, Leslie Probyn, on the Aro People.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. NNAE, Arodist 1/7/31, see no. E Conf. 136/1912 of 28 December 1912, from H. Bedwell, Provincial Commissioner, Eastern Province.
28. Afigbo, "The Eclipse of the Aro Slaving Oligarchy."
29. NNAE, Arodist 1/7/31, Report on the Long Juju, dated 13 October 1912.
30. Ibid.
31. Afigbo, "The Eclipse of the Aro Slaving Oligarchy."
32. NNAE, Arodist 1/7/31, Report on the Long Juju, dated 31 October 1912.
33. Ibid.
34. NNAE, Arodist 1/7/31, no. E. Conf. 136/1912, from H. Bedwell.
35. Ibid.
36. NNAE, Arodist 1/7/31, see Conf. no. 693/1913 of 9 December 1913, from the Acting District Commissioner, Aro Chukwu.
37. NNAE, Arodist 1/7/31, see statement by Okoroafor Akakpo of Abagu dated 20 September 1915.
38. Information from the field. This particular information came from Mazi Onwumere Mgborie, who was at the time the priest of Ajala Agballa in Ihube, and Mazi Okororie Akuuko, who was the priest of Okpara Ugo also in Agballa, Ihube. Both of them had apparently been approached in this connection.
39. Afigbo, "The Eclipse of the Aro Slaving Oligarchy"; A. E. Afigbo, "Herbert Richmond Palmer and Indirect Rule in Eastern Nigeria 1915–1918"; A. E. Afigbo, "Anthropology and Colonial Administration in Eastern Nigeria, 1891–1939," in

Nigerian History, Politics, and Affairs: The Collected Essays of Adiele Afigbo, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005).

40. See the references in note 39, above, especially Afigbo, “Anthropology and Colonial Administration.”

41. NNAE, C.4/45—Afdist 6/6/5, no. M.P.39/1923 of 23 May 1923, from Ag. D.O., Awgu.

42. *Ibid.*

43. See handwritten Report by Mr. G. B. S. Chapman, in NNAE, C.4/45—Afdist 6/6/5.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–25.

46. NNAE, C.4/45—Afdist 6/6/5, Memorandum no. 1132/25/1924 of 24 December 1926, from D.O. Afikpo to the Resident Ogoja Province.

47. NNAE, C.4/45—Afdist 6/6/5, see undated document by Resident, titled “Report on Slavery in the Ogoja Province,” pp. 11–14.

48. NNAE, C.4/45—Afdist 6/6/5, Memorandum no. 247/25/1924 of 8 April 1927, from D.O. Afikpo to the Resident, Ogoja Province; see also Memorandum no. OG:T.45/1927 of 26 April 1927, from the Resident Ogoja Province to the D.O., Afikpo Division.

49. NNAE, C.4/45—Afdist 6/6/5, see pp. 24–25.

50. *The Slavery Ordinance, 1916*, printed by the Government Printer, Lagos, 13 July 1916.

51. See NNAE, Rivprof 6/8/37, file C.353/13, Copy of a Minute by H.E. (FDL) dated 26 April 1916; see the attached Memorandum from Bedwell and the enclosures.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

55. NNAE, Nsudist Criminal Judgment Book 1913–1915, see Case no. 1 of 25 July 1914, in the District Court of Okwoga, Rex vs. Ejemgbe and Okpwe, Charge: Seizing one Odo of Ukehe about one month ago.

56. NNAE, Rivprof 8/4/296, OW 334/16, Rex vs. Iwuoha and Ofor Charged with Kidnapping of Children, Okigwe.

57. NNAE, Rivprof 8/5/47, OW 47/17, Rex vs. Ebube Dike of Nkwerre Charged with Kidnapping.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Unless where otherwise stated, the material for the rest of the chapter comes from the unnumbered file, Rex vs. Duruibe Ofor and three others charged with contravening section 371 (1) of the Criminal Code, photocopy in the possession of the author.

Chapter 5

1. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, Slave Dealing and Child Stealing, Southern Provinces, para. 86, being an extract from Annual Report, Owerri Province, 1/930/772, for 1932.

2. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, Strictly Conf. Memorandum no. S.P. 9994/42 of 23 November 1933, from the Secretary, Southern Provinces (hereafter SSP) to the Honourable Chief Secretary to the Government (hereafter CSG).

3. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, Memorandum no. S.P. 9994/42 of 23 November 1933, to CSG.
4. Ibid.
5. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, Child Stealing, see C/280 of June 1933, from H. C. Stevenson, District Officer Owerri, to the Resident Owerri Province.
6. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, see para. 4 of Strictly Conf. Memorandum no. S.P. 9994/42 of 23 December 1933, from SSP to CSG.
7. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, see para. 4 of Memorandum no. S.P. 9994/95 of 14 June 1934, from SSP to CSG.
8. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see para. 8 of Conf. Report no. 4/2/33 of 5 January 1934, on Slave Dealing for Month of December 1933.
9. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see para. 30 of Conf. Report, Port Harcourt, 10 February 1934, by Major Garden.
10. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see Conf. Report, Port Harcourt, 5 April 1934, by Major Garden.
11. Ibid.
12. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, see para. 11 of Conf. S.P. 9994/270 of 8 August 1935, from SSP to CSG.
13. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see para. 4 of Conf. Report 217/vol. 11/20 of 4 December 1934, by C. R. Bell.
14. NNAE, C. Confidential 15/19—Calprof 4/8/30, Chief Bassey Duke Ephraim: Charge of Slave Dealing Against.
15. Information from the field.
16. NNAE, Rivprof 8/11/163, OW 197/1923, see telegram no. 2623/994 of 13 September 1937.
17. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, See Memorandum no. C.136/144 of 14 June 1935, from the Resident, Owerri Province, to SSP.
18. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see para. 11 of Conf. Memorandum no. C358/vol. iii/19 of 11 March 1935, from Mr. G. Allen, D. O. Bende, to the Senior Resident, Owerri.
19. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, see para. 4 of no. S.P. 9994/95 of 14 June 1934, from SSP to CSG.
20. A. E. Afigbo, “Pre-Colonial Trade Links between Southeastern Nigeria and the Benue Valley,” *Journal of African Studies* 4, no. 2 (1977): 119–39; A. E. Afigbo, “Trade and Trade Routes in Nineteenth Century Nsukka,” *JHSN* 7, no. 1 (1973); D. C. Dorward, “Pre-Colonial Tiv Trade and Cloth Currency,” paper presented at the seminar on the Economic History of the Central Savanna of West Africa, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, January 1976; W. R. G. Horton, “The Ohu System of Slavery in a Northern Ibo Village-Group,” *Africa* 24, no. 4 (1954); Simon Ottenberg, *Farmers and Townspeople in a Changing Nigeria: Abakaliki during Colonial Times, 1905–1960* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., 2005), 31–33; Simon Ottenberg, “Ibo Oracles and Intergroup Relations,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 14, no. 3 (1958): 295–317; Omenka, Nicholas, “Spirit Landing: The Place of Former Slaves in Christian Evangelism in The Biafran Hinterland,” paper presented at the International Conference on The Repercussions of the Atlantic Slave Trade—The Interior of the Bight of Biafra and the African Diaspora, Nike Resort Hotel, Enugu, 10–14 July 2000. Omenka notes that many of the slaves whom the Catholic fathers ransomed (i.e., bought from slave dealers), in the mistaken belief that the best way of ending the internal slave trade was by “participating”

in it, “had been capture[d] from places as far away as the Benue, Chad and Nupe” and brought to Onitsha for sale.

21. NNAI, C.S.O. 26/2, no. 11679, vol. 4, Annual Report on Onitsha Province for 1926, see para. 51; NNAE, Rivprof 1/2/2, C.31/16, containing extract from Muri Province—Annual Report 1915 (M.P. 365P/1916, by Mr. J. M. Freemantle, Resident).

22. Rosemary Harris, *The Political Organization of the Mbembe, Nigeria* (London: HMSO, 1965), 82. See also NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, paras. 8 and 13c of Conf. no. S.P. 9994/95 of 14 June 1938, from SSP to CSG; NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, para. 27 of Conf. Report, Port Harcourt, 10 February 1934, by Major Garden.

23. In connection with this practice, I grew up hearing the melodramatic story of a group of children who, before setting out to fetch firewood, were counted by an elder who told them they were seven in number and ordered them to repeat the exercise before setting out for home after fetching firewood, to ensure no one was missing. Consequently, as the group was about to set out for home after searching the bush for firewood, their leader obediently repeated the counting exercise without counting himself and naturally arrived at the number six, which suggested that one person was missing. Every other member of the group who did the counting repeated the mistake of the leader. The result was that they started wailing, and continued wailing as they walked toward home, until they met an elder who, on finding out the reason for their sorrow, did the counting himself and reassured them that their numbers were complete and that no one had been kidnapped by slave raiders.

24. D. Northrup, *Trade without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 75–76.

25. NNAE, Rivprof 2/11/187, C.578/1930, Suspected Slave Dealing in Opobo, Memorandum 1340/OP.123/1930, dated 26 November 1930, from D.O. Opobo District to the Resident, Calabar Province.

26. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see para. 10 of Conf. Memorandum no. C.358/vol. ii/19 of 11 March 1935, from D.O. Bende to the Senior Resident, Owerri Province.

27. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, see paras. 4 and 10 of Memorandum S.P. 9994/95 of 14 June 1934, from SSP to CSG.

28. U. I. Chima, “Ezza-Aro Relations,” BA thesis, Department of History and Archaeology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, June 1976, 20. For more information on Eke Imoha as a prominent center in the slave trade business, see Ottenberg, *Farmers and Townspeople*, 30.

29. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see paras. 5 and 6 of Conf. Report, Port Harcourt, 10 February 1934, by Major Garden.

30. NNAE, Calprof 10/3, see Report by R. Granville dated 10 June 1902, which is attached to Letter No. 9 of 12 June 1902, by the Acting Divisional Commissioner, Richard Morrisey.

31. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see para. 2 of Conf. Report E/3 of 1 December 1935, by Haydock-Wilson.

32. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see para. 9 of Conf. Report, Port Harcourt, 10 February 1934, by Major Garden.

33. *Ibid.*, para. 7.

34. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, Memorandum no. S.P. 9994/95 of 14 June 1934, from SSP to CSG; see also NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, Conf. Report, Port Harcourt, 10 February 1934, by Major Garden.

35. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see Conf Report, Port Harcourt, 10 February 1934, by Major Garden.

36. *Ibid.*

37. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, Conf. Report, 1 October 1934, from Mr. C. R. Bell, paras. 3 and 4.

38. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, Conf. Report, Port Harcourt, 10 February 1934, by Major Garden; see also NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, para. 8 of Memorandum no. S.P. 9994/95 of 14 June 1934, from SSP to CSG.

39. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, Conf. Report, Port Harcourt, 10 February 1934, by Major Garden.

40. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994: Slave Dealing and Child Stealing, Southern Provinces, see pp. 43–44. Professor Onwuka Njoku, a native of Ohafia, who is also the author of a standard work on Ohafia history, says a similar practice obtains in matrilineal Ohafia: “Men who did not have sisters or whose matrilineages were on the verge of extinction (for want of females) married from distant places. Reason: the children of the marriage would belong to the man’s matrilineage; so also the wife herself.”

41. Rhodes House, Oxford, MSS. Afr. S. 1498, Diaries of Travel by Political Officers in Old Calabar Division 1921–1927, see pp. 65, 66, and 67, entries by S. T. Harvey.

42. Rhodes House, Oxford, MSS. Afr. S. 546, Sir Bernard Carr, “Reminiscences 1919–1949,” p. 10.

43. Afigbo, “The Eclipse of the Aro Slaving Oligarchy.” See also NNAE, Calprof 10/3 Report of 10 June 1902, from R. Granville; NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, Conf. Report no. 4/2/33 of 5 January 1934, by Major Garden; also pp. 40–42 of file no. C.136, Child Stealing.

44. The rumor that the British were about to leave the colony remained rife in these parts for a decade or two after the outbreak of the First World War. The story was that the Germans had won the war, but the British attributed this story to deductions made by their unsophisticated subjects from the fact that white officers were few on the ground during the war and for many years afterward. The story was causing trouble for the administration in many parts of Onitsha Province, for instance, in Nkanu, near Enugu, up to about 1926 and in Nsukka Division in 1919. See, for instance, PRO, C.O. 583/75, Nigerian Despatches, especially Nigeria Confidential of 1 May and 14 June 1919.

45. C.S.O. 28994, Slave Dealing and Child Stealing, Southern Provinces, p. 44.

46. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see Report by Major Garden, Port Harcourt, 10 February 1934, para. 8, and Report by Major Garden, dated 5 April 1934, second to last paragraph.

47. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, quoted in memo no. S.P. 9994/95 of 14 June 1934 from S.S.P. to C.S.G.

48. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994: Slave Dealing and Child Stealing, Southern Provinces, see pp. 28–32; see also NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, Conf. no. C358/vol. iii/19 of 11 March 1935 from D.O. Bende.

49. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see Report no. 217/vol. 3/210/09 of 4 February 1935, by S. P. George.

50. See *ibid.*, para. 4.

51. NNAE, AW 546, Awdist 2/1/363, Udorie (Girl) of Aro-Nanka—Whereabout of (1932).

52. See p. 35 of NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, Slave Dealing and Child Stealing, Southern Provinces, which is a copy of NIGERIA no. 1689, from Downing Street, signed by J. H. Thomas and addressed to Governor Bourdillon; see also p. 36.

53. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, Conf. Memorandum no. 28994/67 of 1 May 1934.

54. Cited in NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, Memorandum no. S.P. 9994/348 of 20 April 1936, from SSP to CSG.

55. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, Conf. Memorandum C./250 of 17 June 1933, from H. C. Stevenson, D.O. Bende, to the Senior Resident, Owerri Province, see para. 4.

56. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, Memorandum no. S.P. 9994/95 of 14 June 1934, from SSP to CSG, see para. 4.

57. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, Conf. Memorandum no. 28994/67 of 1 May 1934 from Ag. SSP, summarizing Major Garden's report (see para. 16 of memorandum).

58. See NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, Conf. Report, Port Harcourt, 10 February 1934, from Major Garden, para. 30; also NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, Conf. Memorandum no. 28994/67 of 1 May 1934 from Ag. SSP.

59. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see Report no. 217/vol. ii/189 of 11 October 1934, from C. R. Bell.

60. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, Conf. Memorandum no. C.101/210, 4 December 1933.

61. See NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, Slave Dealing and Child Stealing, Southern Provinces, p. 46, and para. 4 of minute to CSG dated 22 March 1936. The signature of the minuting officer cannot be deciphered in the copy I saw.

62. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, see Conf. Memorandum no. 2125/vol. iii/212 of 18 March 1936, from the I.G. to the CSG.

63. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, Conf. Report no. 1/2/33 of 5 January 1934, from Major Garden.

64. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, Slave Dealing and Child Stealing, Southern Provinces, see pp. 42 and 45; also NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, Conf. Report of 10 February 1934, by Major Garden.

65. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, Conf. Report of 5 April 1934, by Major Garden, see para. 4.

66. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, Slave Dealing and Child Stealing, Southern Provinces, see p. 17.

67. *Ibid.*, see p. 42; see also NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, Conf. Report 7/5 of 10 March 1934, by Major Garden, last paragraph.

68. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, Conf. Report no. 217/vol. iii/220 of 1 March 1935, by S. P. George.

69. *Ibid.*

70. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, see para. 16 of Memorandum no. S.P. 9994/95 of 14 June 1934, by SSP.

71. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see Conf. Memorandum no. 4/2/33 of 5 January 1934, by Major Garden, especially para. 5.

72. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see Conf. Memorandum no. C.101/210 of 4 December 1933, from the District Officer, Okigwi, Mr. Leeming.

73. *Ibid.*

74. See, for instance, the case in Enugu-Ezike, Nsukka, where the Warrant Chief, Queen Ahebi Ugbabe was reported to be engaged in the buying and keeping of slaves even while serving as the primary center of colonial influence and authority in the clan. See Nwando Achebe, "And She Became a Man: King Ahebi Ugbabe in the

History of Enugu-Ezike, Northern Igboland, 1880–1948,” in *Men and Masculinities in Modern African History*, ed. Stephan F. Miescher and Lisa A. Lindsay (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003), 52–68. See also Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 171, 193. Who could inform against such people and hope to go scot-free?

75. Northrup, *Trade without Rulers*.

76. A. E. Afigbo, “The Aro of Southeastern Nigeria: A Socio-Historical Analysis of Legends of Their Origin,” *African Notes* 6, no. 2 (1971): 31–46, and 7, no. 1 (1972): 91–106.

77. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see Conf. Memorandum no. C.101/210 of 4 December 1933, from the District Officer, Okigwi, Mr. Leemong.

78. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see Conf. Memorandum dated 10 January 1934, by Major Garden, especially para. 15.

79. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see Conf. Memorandum 217/vol. 13/210 of 4 February 1935, by S. P. George, especially paras 6(c) and 6(g). For more details of this cultural immersion among the Ijo of the Niger Delta, for instance, see S. J. S. Cooley, “An Igbo Slave Story of the Late Nineteenth Century and Its Implications,” *Ikenga, Journal of African Studies* 1, no. 2 (1972): 1–9; Robin Horton, “From Fishing Village to City State: A Social History of New Calabar,” in *Man in Africa*, ed. Mary Douglas and P. M. Kaberry (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1971), 38–60; Robin Horton, “Igbo: An Ordeal for Aristocrats,” *Nigeria Magazine*, no. 90 (September 1966): 169–83. When Latham talks about slaves “who were fully Eficised,” he is referring to slaves who had undergone this process of full cultural immersion in Efik society and culture. See A. J. H. Latham, *Old Calabar 1600–1891: The Impact of the international Economy upon a Traditional Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 32. Unfortunately we do not as yet have any description of the form this process took among the Efik.

80. P. A. Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush* (London: William Heinemann, 1912), 327.

81. NNAE, C. P. 2039—Calprof 3/1/1928, see p. 48, letter from the General Secretary, Ibibio Union, to the Resident, 26 November 1946.

82. See the evidence of the second witness for the prosecution in chapter 4. In the eyes of young Udorie, what the broken eggs were mixed with was mud, but in all likelihood it was a standard preparation for such occasions, made of roots and herbs ground into fine powder with kaolin and kept ready for occasions on which it would be needed.

83. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, see extract from the Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the Peoples of Nigeria for 1934, p. 37 of file.

84. NNAE, Rivprof 2/1/24, C.136, see Conf. Report, Port Harcourt, 10 February 1934, by Major Garden, especially para. 26.

85. NNAI, C.S.O. 28994, see Conf. Memorandum no. 2125/vol. iii/212 of 18 March 1936, from the Inspector-General of Police to CSG.

86. NNAE, C.P. 2039—Calprof 3/1/1928, see M.P.2039/42, from the Resident, Calabar Province, to SSP, 9 June 1942.

87. NNAE, C.P. 2039—Calprof 3/1/1928, see no. IU/10/123 of 26 November 1946, from the General Secretary, Ibibio Union, to the Resident, Calabar Province.

88. NNAE, CP 2039—Calprof 3/1/1928, see letter of 19 November 1947, from Joseph Okon, p. 56 of file.

Conclusion

1. NNAE, C.P. 2039—Calprof 3/1/1928, M.P. no. P.C. 1/1/1931 of 15 June 1931, from the Itu District.
2. P. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 2–28.
3. NNAE, C.P. 2039—Calprof 3/1/1928, M.P. no. P.C. 1/1/1931 of 15 June 1931, from the Itu District.
4. Ibid.
5. A. I. Nnochiri, “Agbagwu Market and the Slave Trade in Uzuakoli before 1930,” BA essay, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, July 1982; see the unedited, unabridged field notes.
6. Dike, *Trade and Politics*, 38: “Aro colonies became the divinely ordained trade centres in the interior; Aro middlemen the economic dictators of the hinterland.”
7. Interview with Chief Omeje of Nsukka Town, Nsukka, 1972.
8. On the basis of little or no evidence and an inadequate grasp of the cultural usages of the peoples in question, Carolyn Brown thinks differently. Thus, she believes that the use of references to involvement in the slave trade of long ago to explain individual or family calamities today “suggests that the slave trade continues to hang in a troublesome way in popular imagination.” However, this is nothing but the imposition of diaspora consciousness and thinking on people who have probably filed the slave trade away in the same cabinet as such crimes as incest, the shedding of the blood of a kinsman or kinswoman, witchcraft, and so on. See Carolyn Brown, “Memory as Resistance: Identity and the Contested History of Slavery in Southeastern Nigeria, an Oral History Project,” in *Fighting the Slave Trade*, ed. Sylviane Diouf (Oxford: James Currey, 2003), 219–25.
9. R. Harris, *The Political Organization of the Mbembe, Nigeria* (London: H.M.S.O., 1965), quoted in S. O. Onor, *The Ejagham Nation in the Cross River Region of Nigeria* (Ibadan: Kraft Books Ltd., 1994), 133.
10. Latham, *Old Calabar 1600–1891*, 25–26.
11. Available information shows that these taboos were more or less of uniform character and tendency in the societies covered in this study. For the Ibibio, for instance, attention is drawn to the findings of Edet Udo as contained in his *Who Are the Ibibio?* (Onitsha: Africana-FEP Publishers, 1983), 273–76. Similar conclusions can also be drawn from a look at Talbot’s study of this topic in vol. 3 of *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*.

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The C.S.O. series at the Nigerian National Archives, Ibadan (NNAI), especially C.S.O. 1/13 (Southern Nigeria Despatches to the Foreign and Colonial Offices) and C.S.O. 26, which mainly concerns correspondence between the chief secretary to the government, Lagos, and the lieutenant-governors and heads of central departments.

Nigerian National Archives, Enugu (NNAE), records from the Chief Secretary's Office, Enugu (the C.S.E. series), from the office of the Residents: Calabar Province (Calprof), Ogoja Province (Ogprof), Onitsha Province (Onprof), and Rivers Province (Rivprof); as well as records from district/divisional offices: Awdist (Awka), Arodist (Aro Chukwu), Ondist (Onitsha), Nsudist (Nsukka), and Okdist (Okigwe).

National Archives, Kew, London (formerly the Public Record Office, or PRO)

F.O. 2, Niger Coast Protectorate Despatches to the Foreign Office
C.O. 520, Southern Nigeria, Despatches to the Colonial Office
C.O. 583, Nigerian Despatches to the Colonial Office

Rhodes House, Oxford

The MSS. Afr. S. series, containing the reminiscences and personal papers of some of the political officers who served in southeastern Nigeria during the period under consideration.

Secondary Sources

Books

There are very many works on southeastern Nigeria and the adjoining (former) Benin Province in the period covered in this study. But, as was

pointed out in the text, hardly any of these say anything significant about the internal slave trade and the campaign by the colonial authority to abolish it. The titles listed below are, in my opinion, those that have even a tangential relevance to the concern of this work.

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A. E. Afigbo is professor in the Department of History and International Relations at Ebonyi State University, Nigeria.

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