The Abolitionist Era in Pre-Colonial West African Territories: An Assessment

By

Anthony E. Nkwocha Ksji, Ph.D
Department of History and International Studies
Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri
E-Mail: tonynkwocha@gmail.com
Phone No; 07061398206, 08174520213
&
Achubie Chinedu Remigius
Department Of Political Science
Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Educaiton, Owerri
Phone No: 08030745297

Abstract

Diverse opinions expressed by Scholars, Historians, Political Scientists have made the issue of the abolition of the nefarious triangular trade that criss-crossed the Americas, Europe and Africa very controversial. Critically, Eurocentric historians have attributed the abolition of the slave trade to purely humanitarian or moral and religious consideration while Afrocentric historians feel that "the slave trade was abolished largely because of certain economic changes in Britain in the early nineteenth century such as the Industrial Revolution that paved the way for the legitimate trade. This paper rejects the views of Eurocentric historians that attributed the abolition of the slave trade to purely humanitarian or moral and religious considerations. The paper affirms the historic roles played by the American war of Independence, the French Revolution and Humanitarian efforts towards the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. It, wholesomely supports Afro-centric postulations that the "machine age" was primarily responsible for the abolition of the obnoxious trade on human beings. Finally, the paper submits that the abolition of the Trans Atlantic slave trade brought revolutionary changes in the social structure of many West African states such as the establishment of Sierra Leone and Liberia, the era of European missionary enterprise and subsequent colonial conquest of West African territories. To achieve the set objectives of this paper, the researchers adopted descriptive, thematic and inter-disciplinary research methodologies. The

paper also relied heavily on primary and secondary sources of data collection.

Keywords: Abolitionists era, Pre-colonial, West African territories

Introduction

The European Slave Trade as started at about 1441 when ten Africans from the Guinea Coast were shipped to Portugal as a gift to Prince-Henry the Navigator from a sailor named Antam Gonzalves. The discovery of the New World or the Americas in 1492, provided bountiful opportunities for Europe due to the presence of abundant mineral resources such as copper, gold and manganese. Also, West Indian colonies like Peru, Mexico and Cuba provided adequate soil texture for the growth of tropical crops like sugar cane, tobacco, spices; Thus, the abundant natural resources discovered in the new world sparked off competition among European countries like Spain, Portugal, Dutch, Britain and France.

According to the chroniclers of this period, the demographic inadequacies of European countries and the absence of required labour force caused the Spaniards to enslave the native Indian peoples of Aztec and Inca empires who worked as plantation planters. However, majority of the native Indians died in the plantations because of their inability to work under tropical weather. It was the desire to save the Indians from total extermination that prompted Bishop Bartholomew De La Casas to give the fatal advice to replace the Indian labour force with Africans. The Spaniards, were encouraged to import Africans to the New World since; they had proved successful in the sugar plantations in the Mediterranean areas (Agbakwuru, 1977:16).

The slave trade could be seen as the foundation base for European capitalist ventures. It set a wonderful stage for the scramble for and partition of Africa as well as its inherent exploitative tendencies. The syndrome of neo-colonialism took its form and shape from the European Slave Trade (Nkwocha, 2008). The Trans Atlantic Slave Trade which placed Africa at the receiving end of poverty lasted between the 15th and 19th Centuries. In 1772, Lord Mansfield, made a decision that was interpreted to hold that one could not claim a slave as property in the United Kingdom, notwithstanding the local laws of the British colonies (Gallagher

& Stern 2000:396). The Trans Atlantic Slave Trade was abolished in Great Britain by an *Act of Parliament* in 1807 while in 1833, another act of the British Parliament abolished Slavery throughout the British Empire.

Many scholars have postulated different reasons that led to the abolition of the nefarious triangular trade that crisscrossed the Americas, Europe and Africa. Diverse opinions expressed by Scholars, Historians, Political Scientists and Social Scientists have made the abolition issue very controversial. Eurocentric historians like Coupland, Mathieson and Mellor cited in Boahen (1977:114) have attributed the abolition of the slave trade to purely humanitarian or moral and religious considerations. Conversely, Afrocentric historians like Dike and Williams argue that "the slave trade was abolished largely because it had now become more profitable to seek in West Africa raw materials and markets rather than slaves (Boahen, 1977:114).

Theoretical Framework

In an attempt to present a vivid assessment of the abolitionist era in pre-colonial West African territories, the researchers relied on the theories of imperialism and Dependency to help us understand several factors that accounted for abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade as well consequences of the abolitionist era on the people of pre-colonial West Africa.

The Theory of Imperialism

Research works on imperialism are many and varied in contemporary social and political documentaries. For instance, the Encyclopedia Britannica (1960) defines imperialism as "the policy of a state aiming at establishing control beyond its borders over people unwilling to accept such control due to its imperialistic undertone. Mahajan, (1988:859) on his own asserts that imperialism is employment of the engines of government and diplomacy to acquire territories, protectorates and/or sphere of influence occupied totally by the other races or peoples and to promote industrial, trade and investment opportunities. Hobson, a major liberal scholar in his book, *Imperialism: A study*, published in 1965 postulates that investment and allied financial interests seeking an outlet outside the nation for surplus savings constituted the "economic taproot of imperialism. Hobson argues that… over population in the sense of an excessive manufacturing plant, and

surplus capital which could not find sound investments within the country, forced Great Britain, Germany, Holland, France to place larger and larger portions of their economic resources outside the area of their present political domain, and then stimulate a policy of political expansion so as to take in the new areas. Hence, trading settlements were forced upon Asia Minor, in East and West Africa, in China and elsewhere (Hobson, 1970: 264-265).

Lenin-a Marxian scholar in his book, *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, affirms that the quest for foreign investment due to acquisition of surplus capital was the foundation base for the acquisition of colonies overseas in the twentieth century. Espousing the ideals of Marxism-Leninism, Lenin argued that, "as capitalism developed, units of industrial production grew bigger and combined trusts and cartels to produce monopoly capitalism. Monopoly-financed capitalism was aggressively expansionist thereby resulting in the exploitation of the colonial people and works between colonizing nations (Mahajan, 1970:764). The major fealive of imperialism advanced by Lenin include; the growth of power of monopolies and financial capital, the vast growth in the export of capital, the formation of international monopolies and the partition of the world between the various imperialist powers (Lenin, 1964:123).

Relating the views of Hobson, Mahajan and Lenin to the colonized territories in West Africa during the abolitionist era, the writers of this work reaffirm that the economic basis of imperialism which was traceable to surplus capital and over production of goods during the era of industrial revolution in Europe influenced seriously the scramble for and partition of West Africa territories by Europe who had dire need to export Africa's abundant natural resources/raw materials for their industries. Another compelling argument about the theory of imperialism in West Africa was that it was natural that industrialized countries of Europe would have serious challenges in their economic fortunes due to problems posed by over production of manufactured goods and absence of markets in Europe due to competing interests. The economic imperialism of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries was a deliberate economic policy nurtured by a superior European civilization to stimulate and sustain economic growth in the industrialized countries who had no choice than to scramble for the partition West African territories in their search for overseas markets that will buy their surplus manufactured goods and in turn

provide raw materials for their industries. Thus, the legitimate trade that prevailed during the abolitionist era in West Africa was only introduced to entrench the domination and exploitation of the economies of West African territories by the shrewed European visitors whose activities in Africa whether as explorers, traders, missionaries and abnomalists were guided by the economic principle of imperialism.

For instance, in the Niger Delta region, the repressive nature of Consular Administrators like Beecraft and Hewett, showed Niger Delta rulers like Jaja of Opobo, Nana Olomu of Itshekiri, Koko of Brass Nembe, Oba Ovonranwen of Benin etc that they harboured imperial ambition during the era of the legitimate trade aimed at ensuring economic and political subjugation of the Niger Delta territories through the auspice of the Royal Nigeria Company (RNC). The forces of imperialism seem to mystify the superiority of the European stock in its bid to propagate racism and cultural imperialism and at the same time reinforce imitative dependence, inculcate an inferiority complex, weaken the will of third word peoples in Africa to take their destiny into their own hands and render them more available for exploitation by European countries (Okolo, 2015:107). Hence, Ake (1979:137) and Smith (1999:19) maintain that "imperialism" still hurts, still destroys and reform itself constantly in order to place African countries at the receiving end of poverty. Equally, Aime Ceasaire (1994:173), bemoans the civilizing mission of colonizing powers in Africa and the dark sides of 'imperialism' and 'colonization' of African territories by the colonizing powers in Europe in the following manner,

> …Although, colonization has the advantage of bringing different worlds together… this feat is lost because colonization works to decivilize the colonized, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts of covetousness, violence, racial hatred and moral relativism…

The Abolition of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade: Issues and Analysis

Critically, several factors accounted for the abolition of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade. These factors can be grouped under political, economic, social and intellectual.

Political Factors

(I) **The American War of Independence:** The revolt of British-American colonies against Britain which led to American Independence influenced the abolition of the triangular trade. A large number of Negroes served in the land and sea forces of the patriots. Many Negroe troops, were assigned to integrated units where they served beside white comrades. Many (of these black soldiers) distinguished themselves by acts of bravery (Schuyten, 1968:90). Americans who fought alongside the slaves set many of the slaves free after the war of independence and also campaigned against the institution of slavery in post-independent America. Thus, the declaration of American Independence in Congress, in July 4, 1776 espoused the equality of all human beings irrespective of their racial background as stated below;

> ...that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and pursuit of happiness (Schuyten, 1968:82).

(ii) The French Revolution

The French Revolution of 1789 which overthrew the 'ancien regime' in France taught Europe and America the importance of liberty, Equality and brother hood of men and the need to extend these rights and protection to the slaves. French philosophers like Jean Jacques Rousseau in his treatise *Social Contract* declared that "the true sovereign is the people and that men are by nature free and equal' (Appadorai, 2004:28). Equally, Montesquieu a French writer declared that "slavery was contrary to every principle of law, human or divine" (Ashaolu, Falodun, Daramola & Onibonoje, 1970:81). The doctrine of equality as espoused in the declaration of the Rights of Man drawn up by the revolutionaries in 1789, meant primarily that all men are equal before the law, and signified the abolition of privilege, the end of serfdom and the destruction of the feudal system" (Appadorai, 2004:230). The revolutionary philosophies and ideas that accompanied the French Revolution, convinced both humanitarians and abolitionists in Europe and America that the institution of slavery was a social evil which forcefully cut short the freedom of its victims and as well violates the dignity of the human person.

(B) Economic Factors:

Economic changes that took place in Britain in the early nineteenth century were very favourable for the abolition of the slave trade. Between 1800 and 1830, mainly as a result of the Industrial Revolution that is the change from production by hand to production by machines, all industries in Europe ceased to rely on the West Indian Islands for the supply of slaves. Dike (1956) in support of the view that the 'machine age' was primarily responsible for the abolition of the obnoxious trade on human begins asserts thus;

> ...the slave trade, which had fitted perfectly into the scheme of mercantilist economics was being rendered obsolete by the rapid technological advance in industrial production...

As a foremost industrialized nation the world over, Britain needed palm products to lubricate her factory machines as well as overseas markets in Africa for the sale of industrial products. Thus, by the early nineteenth century, it had become clear that the slave trade had ceased to be a prop to the economy of Britain, and that Africa could serve Britain more effectively by producing cash-crops rather than by supplying labour to the West Indian colonies, and it was these considerations which mainly led to the abolition of the entire slave system between 1807 and 1833 (Boahen, 1979:116-117). The abolition of the slave trade was as a result of strong economic forces at work in the West Indies and in Britain between the sugar barons and the industrial barons. The economic and political power of the landed gentry who owned plantations weakened after the loss of the former British colony, America. Thus, those who belonged to the industrial class began to share power with those who owned large plantations and also began to influence decisions in parliament (Omolewa, 1986:105). In short, the legitimate trade on cash crop appeared more beneficial to Britain economically than the triangular trade because it enabled Britain to procure raw materials needed by her industries from West Africa which will equally provide ready markets for manufactured goods. Thus, economic considerations with strong capitalist orientation, influenced the abolition of slave trade more than humanitarian considerations.

(C) Humanitarian Factors:

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries produced humanists who campaigned fervently against the triangular trade due to its inhuman nature. Some popular

seventeenth century humanists were Richard Baxter, Morgan Godwyn and John Locke. For instance, Richard Baxter, in his Christian Directory, published as far back as 1673 denounced the slave trade as "the common enemies of mankind' (Onwubiko, 1982:279). Morgan Godwyn, an Anglican Clergyman from Oxford after a visit to Barbados exposed the in human treatment of slaves on the plantations. He described the slave trade as a "cruelty capable of no palliation". Similarly, John Locke, in his Treatise on *Civil Government* published in 1689, stated that the slave trade was so evil that it could hardly be conceived that an English man, much less a gentleman should plead for it (Onwubiko, 1982:279). Other notable humanists of the eighteenth century include, Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, Bentham, William Wilberforce, of Britain, President Abraham Lincoln, Fredrick Douglas, Alexander Cromwell, and Martin Delaney of America, and others like Oluadah Equiano (Qustavas Vassa) and Ottobah Cugoano (John Steuart) of West Africa. Both Cugoano and Equiano used their works, *Thoughts and sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the slavery and commerce of the Human species* and *The Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* to expose the cruelties associated with the triangular trade. The Humanitarian Movement formed the Society for the abolition of the slave trade in May, 1787 and the British Anti-Slavery society in 1823 and it was these two Societies, who conducted the campaign against the slave trade (Boahen, 1979:115).

Similarly, In 1772, Granville Sharp, brought a test case before Lord Chief Justice Mansfield to establish whether a slave had freedom under the laws of Britain. This was the famous test case of Somerset Versus Knowles. The Chief Justice ruled, that once a slave, had set his feet on the British soil, he is automatically free. The abolitionists in Britain were able to convince a few interested countries to legislate against the trade one after the other, first it was Denmark in 1804, next it was the United States of America in 1808. Sweden, followed the example in 1813 and the Netherlands in 1814 (Ashaolu, Falodun, Daramola and Onibonoje, 1970:82-83). Also, some religious bodies like the Roman Catholics, Quakers, Wesleyans and Anglicans preached and condemned the trade as being opposed to the laws of God and humanity. They also appealed to their members to shun the evil of trade in human cargo (Onwubiko, 1982:279). Although, moral and humanitarian considerations were crucial factors that quickened the abolition process, it is note worthy to stress that the abolition of slavery in Britain in 1807 and its colonies in

1833 became a matter of Government policy as a result of the imperialist gains of the industrial revolution. It is also pertinent to observe that some of the policy thrust of the Abolitionists and the Evangelical movements for the post-slave trade era in West Africa which primarily centered on Christianity, legitimate trade and colonization still harboured certain imperialistic undertones. For instance, William Wilberforce and his colleagues, recommended that efforts should be made to convert and educate the people of West Africa to the Christian way of life, to develop a healthy trade in commodities other than slaves, and to establish pioneer communities in West Africa which would demonstrate to her people good methods of Agriculture, Industry and Government (Fage, 1972:116).

This research endeavour salutes the efforts of the Humanitarian Movement and Missionary Associations that worked tirelessly for the establishment of Freetown and Sierra Leone for freed slaves from England, Nova Scotia and Jamaica, it is still plausible to support the views of Webster, Boahen and Idowu(1971:79) who argued and reasonably too that the Abolitionists set a pattern of humanitarianism which, though often weak, especially in the first half of the twentieth century, has never the less always been a part of British colonial policy".

Intellectual Considerations

The age of enlightenment in Europe produced intellectuals who periscoped the obnoxious slave trade with critical minds. These intellectuals in the persons of Adam Smith, Rousseau, Thomas Paine, and Samuel Johnson idealized such virtues as equality, fraternity and the liberty of man and also condemned the institution of slavery and slave trade mainly on moral and hurmanitarian grounds. For instance, Adam Smith shattered the economic basis of slavery by arguing that free labour was cheaper and more productive than slave labour. This argument sternmed from the fact that in the late eighteenth century, the prices of West Indian sugar in Britain was said to be double those on the continent and this was blamed on slave labour on which West Indian sugar planters still depended (Onwubiko, 1982:281). Jean Jacques Rousseau postulated that "the right to enslave is non-existent, it is not merely illegitimate, but absurd and meaningless as well" (llo, 2008:82). The philosopher, John Locke, denounces slavery as unreasonable since "labour being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to what he is joined to... (llo, 2008:82). Equally, Thomas Paine used his book,

The Rights of Man to arouse public sympathy on the misery and cruelty involved in the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade (Ogini, 1981:179-180).

The Suppression of the Slave Trade in West Africa

The era of Industrial Revolution which took effect in England between 1760 and 1840, helped Britain to adjust quickly to legitimate commerce on agricultural products. The shift towards an industrial economy and the combined efforts of Humanitarian/Evangelical Movements paved the way for Lord Mansfield's judgement of 1772 and the Act of Parliament of 1807 which abolished slave trade in Great Britain.

In 1833, the British Government through an Act of Parliament abolished slave trading activities throughout British colonies including West Africa. Sudanese empires, kingdoms and Republican democracies in Oyo, Asante, Fante, Dahomey and the Niger Delta region resisted the abolitionist efforts of Britain because their economies couldn't effectively adjust to the demands of legitimate commerce in view of the fact that palm oil which Britain now favoured was available only in some areas, not in all, whereas slaves were available almost every where in West Africa. And unlike the trade in slaves, that in palm oil required time and labour both for gathering the palm nuts and for extracting the oil. It also required transport and containers for conveying the oil to the coast (Ogini, 1981:183-184). The intransigence of West African rulers forced the British Government to establish a Preventive Naval squadron which patrolled the Atlantic Ocean and West African Coast lands inspecting ships to ensure that they were not carrying human cargo. Also, a Court of Mixed Commission comprising French. Spanish, English and Dutch jurists tried offenders on both the European and African sides.

The present writers of this research work believe that the deployment of British War ships to the Atlantic Ocean and West African Coast had imperial implications since Imperial Britain used this strong military presence to interfere in the social, economic and political activities of the Delta peoples and City States. Afigbo (2009:22-23) succinctly analyzed the sinister motives of the British Naval fleets in this manner;

> ...By means of naval bombardments, naval blockades, diplomatic bullying, harangue and bribery, agents of the mighty British

> Empire compelled them (i.e. West Africans) to drop the export of slaves across the Atlantic. This weakened the economic base on which their socio-cultural eminence had stood and by implication eroded their political authority especially their ability to continue...as of old to offer protection to their visiting European customers, and to fully control the politics of their states as well as protect their citizens from the arrogance of the visiting Europeans.

Effects of the Abolition of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade on West Africa

> ...The steps taken by Europeans about slavery therefore hastened the day when, in their own economic interest, they (i.e. the Europeans) thought it necessary first to conquer the West African kingdoms, and then to continue the process, initiated by African Kings and entrepreneurs, of conquering the segmentary societies and absorbing them into unitary political structures (Fage, Gray and Oliver, 1969:403).

The impact of the abolitionist era on West African territories can be viewed from the perspectives of Eurocentric and Afrocentric historians. Eurocentric historians like Norris and Dalzel cited in Fage (1969:393), argue that European colonization of West African territories during the abolitionist era was morally justified in view of the fact that occupation of West African territories will help to stamp out the evils of slavery and slave trading in West Africa.

Afrocentric historians on the contrary feel that one of the major reasons the abolitionists deemed it desirable to foster and develop legitimate trade was obviously to provide compensation for British merchants who had invested capital in trade with West Africa and who were now debarred from trading in slaves (Fage, 1972:116). The consequences of the abolitionist era on the people of pre-colonial West Africa can be approached from economic, political and socio-cultural perspective;

Economic

i.) Growth of Legitimate Trade

The abolitionist era, witnessed the commencement of legitimate commerce in West Africa. The legitimate trade involved trade on agricultural produce like palm oil, groundnuts, coffee, gum rubber, cotton, timber and cocoa. The major export commodity was palm oil which was needed in Europe for lubricating newly-invented machines and for making soap with which factory workers could wash themselves (Boahen, 1979:123). Critically, the so-called 'legitimate' trade which replaced the slave trade as the staple of West African foreign commerce tended to be based rather on production by large members of small-scale 'peasant' farmers. The major kingdoms had difficulty in adapting their fiscal, economic and political systems in order to profit from this change in the economic structure. For this reason, as the nineteenth century progressed, they seem to have become at once less efficient in securing revenue from, and less able to provide the order needed by, their people's producers and traders (Fage, 1969:403).

The legitimate commerce depicted an exploitative trading relationship whereby European traders bought West African export commodities at cheap rates and in turn sold their manufactured products in West African markets at exorbitant prices. Equally, the legitimate commerce harboured imperialist undertones since rich European business moguls craftily avoided empowering West African farmers with agricultural loans and requisite technology that would have promoted large scale mechanized Agriculture. Many West African farmers whether in Dahomey, Oyo Alaafinate, Lagos, Asante and the Niger Delta region existed at best as subsistent farmers and as such never benefited from the gains of plantation production. The absence of plantation agricultural practice for export purposes created an economic structure which impoverished and weakened West African monarchies while European Countries enjoyed economic boom and favourable balance of payments.

Scholars like Isichei (1987:152), argued that the abolitionist era in West Africa in the nineteenth century witnessed increased use of slaves in agriculture and the palm oil trade thus leading to the establishment of slave plantations in such cities like Calabar or Ibadan which were owned by a few wealthy business men. This does not suggest the existence of an extensive plantation agricultural practice. The

legitimate trade or the palm oil trade, in spite of its shortcomings, represents a vivid demonstration of the ability of the African to respond to economic stimuli in their local environments - a revolutionary feat that contradicted Hopkin's argument of a 'crisis of adaptation' that faced West African States when they, reluctantly, decided to turn their backs to the Atlantic Trade and to embrace trade in cash crops. This crisis unfolded itself, not only at the level of performance, but deeply affected the structure of West-African economy and ultimately paved the way for the colonization of West African States by European powers (Guezo, 2010:132-133).

ii.) Exploration of the Interior Parts of West Africa

The abolitionist era in West Africa provided utmost need for the exploration of West African hinterland regions. European economic interests during the era of the legitimate trade promoted exploratory journeys in West Africa with the view to developing markets for the sale of their manufactured goods and for the purchase of raw materials, especially, palm oil. Equally, European knowledge of hinterland areas helped them to effectively supervise the transition into legitimate commerce and undermine the export of slaves. The expansion of European knowledge of Africa was supported by missionary bodies, humanitarians and opponents of the slave trade, leading to the formation of African Association in 1788 by British Scientists. The mission of African Association of 1788 has been extensively highlighted by Isichei (1987:159) in this manner;

> ...They (i.e. African Association) resolved to concentrate on the problem of the course of the Niger, since the map of inland Africa was 'but a wide extended blank, on which the Geographer... has traced, with a hesitating hand, a few names of unexplored rivers and of uncertain nations'. Nothing reflects Europeans' ignorance of Africa better than the fact that they did not know the Niger Delta, where they had traded for centuries, was the termination of the great river. Some people thought the Niger was linked with the Gambia some with the Congo, and some with the Nile others thought that it flowed into the Great sink of Africa (which did not of course exist).

The African Association sponsored different sets of expeditions on the West African Coasts. For instance, between 1795-1805, a young Scottish doctor-Mungo Park embarked on series of expeditions around the Niger exploring such areas as Segu, Sansanding and Bussa before his death. In 1822, the trio of Oudney, Denham and Clapperton explored Borno, Sokoto and Badagry areas and uncovered that the Niger flowed South. In 1830, the two Lander Brothers, Richard and John discovered the mouth of the river Niger, thereby opening a gateway into the heartland areas of Nigeria. Thus, the exploratory business was to pave the way for Consular Activities and British colonial conquests of territories bordering the Bights of Benin and Biafra as well as Northern Nigerian territories.

Political

i.) Birth of European Imperialism in West Africa

The abolitionist era created room for European colonization of West African Kingdoms and empires. The persistence of slavery and slave trade in the hinterland regions of West Africa frustrated the smooth take-off of the legitimate trade, as well as the spread of Christianity and European civilization in West Africa. Since the Abolitionists harboured imperialist ambitions, they suggested that if the campaign against the slave trade was to succeed, European Governments should afford protection and support to their traders and missionaries in West Africa, intervene in the political affairs of African states to produce peaceful conditions for lawful trade and where necessary, found colonies as bases for fighting the slave trade (Onwubiko, 1982:289). The British Government hearkened to the requests of the abolitionists and quickly set up Consular Administration in Nigeria. She also appointed John Beecroft in 1849 as her Britannic majesty's consul for the 'Bights of Benin and Biafra'. Omolewa, (1986:107) outlined some of the roles of Consular Authorities in Nigeria in the following manner;

> The consuls began to influence the selection of leaders of ruling Houses, as shown by the exile and later restoration of William Dappa Pepple as the ruler of Bonny between 1852 and 1861. Thus, the British consul began to exercise political functions which had never before been exercised by foreigners in Nigeria. Soon, Courts of Equity were established to handle cases related to trade disputes.

In July 10, 1886, Taubman Goldie's firm was given a Royal Charter to operate as the Royal Niger Company. The RNC established its customs station at Akassa, and subjected Brassmen to severe trade restrictions because Brass was not part of the territories under the control of the company since it is situated in the Oil Rivers Protectorate. Frustrated by the reckless monopolistic economic activities of the company officials at Akassa, King Koko of Brass in 1895 raided the Headquarters of the Royal Niger Company at Akassa with about 1000 troops. In retaliation the British consul sent gun-boats which the company used to destroy two important parts of Brass named Nembe and Fish Town (Okafor, 1989:157). To secure a foot hold in Nigerian hinterland areas, European business men began to deceive Nigerians, and indeed, leaders of the Bight of Benin and Biafra into signing treaties of protection. This was done without educating local leaders and people on the long term effect of the treaty they were deceived to enter into. As the level of consciousness of the Niger-Deltans increased and coupled with the gradual but steady loss of political and economic rights to foreigners on account of these treaties, pockets of unorganized resistance to European intrusion were kick-started by the traditional elites (Nkwocha, 2010:6).

Consequently, European counter moves to checkmate and suppress populist revoits by the local people culminated in conflicts and crisis situations. One of the first victims of treaty making was Jaja of Opobo. Jaja signed a treaty with the British by which he placed his kingdom under British protection but refused to open up the interior parts of his kingdon to British merchants. Jaja's action angered Consul Johnston who in 1887 summoned Jaja on board a gun-boat for the settlement of protracted trade dispute between the kingdom and European traders. In the process, Jaja was deported to the West Indies. Similarly, Acting Consul Ralph Moore bombarded the royal domain of Nana Olumo of Itshekiri Kingdom in August 1894 after which Nana was disgracefully deported to the Gold Coast (Ghana) for his blatant refusal to come on board a British warship to face framed false charges of trade monopoly, blocking of trade routes, human sacrifice and illicit trading on human slaves (Okafor 1989:362). Another patriot of the Niger Delta Nationalism was Oba Ovonramwen of Benin. The Benin Kingdom signed a treaty of protection with the British during the regime of vice Consul Gallwey. The terms of this treaty constrained the Oba to allow free trade, accept Christian missionaries in his domain and also stop human sacrifice. Oba Ovonramwen's

refusal to honour the terms of the treaty angered. Consul Philips who decided to go to Benin to overthrow the Oba. As hostilities between the Oba and the Consul deepened, Consul Philip was killed in January 1897. In a reprisal attack, the British invaded Benin, dethroned the Oba and deported him to Calabar.

Evidently, the people of the Niger Delta and her City-states stoutly resisted undue political interference by the British Colonial Administration who used naval bombardments and blockades to enforce the stoping of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade. For instance, the British expedition of 1901/02 against the Long Juju of Arochukwu was designed to break the oracle's resistance to abolitionist efforts. As the British Government expanded her political influence in Nigeria through Consular Administration and Company Rule, the French busied itself in the 1870s with imperial activities in and around Senegal while French posts were established at Goree Island. The French had a few other posts on the West African Coast as well in 1879, established in response to pressure from French palm-oil traders. From 1843, these (posts) included Grand Bassam and Assini, in the future Ivory Coast. They were concerned to maintain a presence in Southern Dahomey, especially after the British conquest of Lagos in 1851 (Isichei, 1985:163-164).

Social Effects

(i) Birth of Missionary enterprise in West Africa:

The abolitionist era provided greater impetus for the birth of missionary enterprise in West Africa. Historians are in agreement that earlier attempts by Portuguese Christian Missionaries to evangelize the Coastland areas of West Africa between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries recorded unimpressive achievements. In the Nineteenth Century, the dimension of European missionary activities increased by leaps and bounds due to the fact that it harboured humanitarian, commercial and political motives. The policy thrust of European missionary enterprise in West Africa was to spread the gospel of truth which will provide moral basis for the stoppage of the slave trade and the institution of slavery in West African hinterland areas. This measure they felt can promote European and Commercial interests. Prominent protestant missionary groups that carried out evangelical activities in West Africa include the Church Missionary Society (founded and run by Evangelical Anglicans), established in 1799 and the Wesleyan Missionary Society. These missions worked in Freetown and West African Coastline areas.

The Catholic congregations which had the greatest impact on West Africa were the Society of African Missions, and the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Isichei, 1985:155).

(i) Establishment of the Colonies of Siera Leone and Liberia

The abolitionist era in West Africa led to the establishment of two settler colonies - Sierra Leone and Liberia. Sierra Leone was founded as a settler colony in 1787. it was called the province of freedom and its initial settlers were an amalgam of freed slaves from England sequel to Lord Mansfield's judgement of 1772. in 1822, the American colonization society established the settler colony of Liberia for freed slaves from the United States.

Conclusion

This research endeavour supports wholesomely the historic roles played by the American war of independence, the French revolution and humanitarian efforts towards the abolition of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade. The paper submits that the Industrial Revolution that ushered in the 'machine age' in Europe was primarily responsible for the abolition of the obnoxious trade on human beings across the Atlantic and its replacement with legitimate commerce. Besides, the development of legitimate trade, the abolitionist a led to the establishment of settler colonies of Sierra Leone and Liberia. It also paved the way for Christian Missionary activities and exploration of the interior parts of West Africa. The mission and vision of both the missionaries and explorers culminated in colonial conquest of West African Countries.

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