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
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**African Historiography**  
**Essays in honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi**

Edited by Toyin Falola



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## Chapter 8

# The historiography of the commercial transition in nineteenth-century West Africa

Robin Law

Professor Ajayi's historical work since the 1950s has been focused primarily upon West Africa during the nineteenth century. His earliest (and arguably, still his most substantial and influential) work of original research, his doctoral thesis of 1958 published in a revised form in 1965, was a study of the impact of the nineteenth-century Christian missions in the Nigeria area, with special emphasis upon their role in the creation of a 'new elite' of Western-educated men who would eventually (though generally not until the following century) rival and displace the 'traditional' rulers of the pre-colonial states as the leaders of African societies.<sup>1</sup> In addition he has made important contributions to the study of the internal history of indigenous West African societies during this period, in particular to the history of the Yoruba states of south-western Nigeria: his principal publications in this field being a detailed study of the origins, course and significance of the Ijaye War of 1860-65 and a general survey of the nineteenth-century Yoruba wars from the collapse of the Oyo kingdom in the 1820s to the imposition of British colonial rule in the 1890s.<sup>2</sup> The strength of Ajayi's writings on these topics has lain not only in the quality of his detailed research, but also in his systematic concern to relate his local case-studies to more general trends and themes in the historiography of West Africa. In other publications, indeed, he has addressed the task of regional generalisation directly, in essays surveying the history of West Africa as a whole during the nineteenth century. The development of his views (but also their basic elements of consistency over time) can be traced through comparison of an early (1965) essay contributed to a school text-book on West African history with his more recent (1976) and more substantial chapter (co-authored with Professor B. O. Oloruntimehin) in the relevant volume of *The Cambridge History of Africa*.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most important general themes explored in Professor Ajayi's writings on the nineteenth century has been the implications for West African societies of the decline of the Atlantic slave trade and its replacement by what became called 'legitimate' (i.e. non-slave) trade, involving primarily the export of agricultural produce (principally, palm oil and kernels). In his early work on Christian missions, he noted that the Christian evangelisation of the nineteenth century was closely bound up with this commercial transition. The missionaries in general held the view that the prospects of religious conversion in Africa were interconnected with, and indeed dependent upon, change in the economic, social and political spheres also. The persistence of the slave trade was

regarded, not merely as a moral outrage, but also as a practical obstacle to the evangelisation of African societies. Conversely, the transition to trade in agricultural produce was believed to hold out the prospect of a revolution in commercial organisation, and hence also in political and social structures, which would facilitate Christian conversion. According to this view, propounded in Thomas Fowell Buxton's *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy* (1840), and subsequently adopted and elaborated by missionary leaders such as Henry Venn (Honorary Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, 1841-72), the way forward lay in breaking the monopoly of trade hitherto enjoyed by the rulers of the coastal states of West Africa, employing the new elite of Christian reparatriates and converts to penetrate the interior and trade directly with the producers of the new agricultural commodities. In Ajayi's own felicitously worded summary, 'The old trade was controlled and restricted by the coastal chiefs, the new one must be free; it must produce both a free peasantry and also a new commercial and industrial class.'<sup>4</sup>

In Ajayi's interpretation, however, this vision of a social revolution which would open up Africa to Christian evangelisation proved illusory. The coastal rulers in practice preserved their position as monopolistic middlemen basically intact in the new trade as in the old. In large part, Ajayi suggests, this was because of the persistence (and, indeed, expansion) in the palm oil trade of the practice of 'trust', or the advancing of goods on credit by European purchasers to African middlemen, which financed the large-scale trading operations of the latter and tied African and European traders into a mutual interdependence which perpetuated 'a pattern of monopoly and rigidity' in commercial organisation on both sides.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the actual production of palm oil in the interior was largely undertaken, not by a 'free peasantry' but by slave labour. Instead of being themselves exported, slaves were now diverted into the production of alternative export crops, so that ironically 'abolition of the slave trade meant more extensive and intensive use of domestic slaves'.<sup>6</sup> Existing rulers, by shifting from slave-dealing to slave-ownership, thus continued to dominate the export trade. This analysis, originally outlined by Professor Ajayi in the 1960s, is refined but in essentials reiterated without significant modification in *The Cambridge History of Africa*. The growth of the trade in palm oil during the nineteenth century, it is there argued, 'created no social revolution, because the West African political, social, and economic systems proved able to meet the changing demands of the coastal trade through adaptation rather than revolution'.<sup>7</sup> On this view, truly revolutionary changes in economic organisation came only after, and in consequence of, the European colonial conquest at the end of the nineteenth century.

In this emphasis on the continuity of African institutions in the face of the commercial transition of the nineteenth century, Professor Ajayi is of course by no means unique or isolated. In particular, an essentially similar argument was forcefully presented in an important article by Ralph Austen published in 1970.<sup>8</sup> In adopting this perspective, however, Ajayi has quite consciously set himself in opposition to a well-established tradition in West African historiography, which has sought to argue that the shift from slaves to palm oil and other agricultural produce did indeed bring about revolutionary political and social change. In modern historiography, this alternative interpretation was first propounded by Professor Dike, in his pioneering study of the nineteenth-century history of the Niger Delta published in 1956.<sup>9</sup> It was given its most influential and comprehensive expression, applying to West Africa as a whole and linking the allegedly disruptive effects of the commercial transition with the European colonial takeover at the end of the nineteenth century, by Tony Hopkins in his influential *Economic History of West Africa* (1973).<sup>10</sup> The debate over the nineteenth-century commercial transition remains, down to the present, one of the centrally important controversies in the interpretation of West African history. Besides questions of empirical detail, the debate raises important issues of historical causation, involving the relationship between political action and the constraints

imposed by economic structures, which have been illuminatingly discussed in a recent review of the topic by Patrick Manning.<sup>11</sup> The present paper is an attempt to survey the historiographical development of the debate, with reference both to works of interpretative generalisation and to locally focused detailed research, and to the interaction between them. While this historiographical approach by its nature cannot pretend to offer any sort of definitive resolution of the problem, it should hopefully at least advance understanding by clarifying the nature of the questions at stake, and the ways in which the progress of historical work has refined and redefined their formulation.

## Nineteenth-century origins of the debate

It should be emphasised, first, that the debate about the political and social consequences of the commercial transition began not with Professor Dike in the 1950s but a century earlier, among contemporary European observers of the process. While propagandists such as Buxton and Venn, as noted by Professor Ajayi, discussed the revolutionary potential of the new 'legitimate' commerce, other European observers believed that they could see the social revolution already happening on the ground in West Africa. In 1842, for example, Francis Swazy, a British merchant active on the Gold Coast, testified to the House of Commons Select Committee on the West Coast of Africa that the rise of 'legitimate' commerce had created an expanded market for European imports: 'The wants of the people are daily increasing . . . In the time of the slave trade [wealth] was in the hands of one or two, who had a great deal of influence . . . now it is more diffused.' In 1848, before the Select Committee on the Slave Trade, another Gold Coast merchant, William Hutton, likewise declared that under the slave trade access to imported goods was 'almost . . . confined to the chiefs, because it is only the chiefs and better classes of the inhabitants of the coast of Africa that can be slave merchants', whereas 'in the legitimate trade, a man may do a very little trade and he may get his living by it . . . the palm oil trade is pursued by all classes', so that 'the tendency of legitimate trade is to extend consumption and increase the number of consumers'.<sup>12</sup>

Such observations were by no means eccentric, or restricted in application to the Gold Coast. Essentially similar views were expressed, for example, by Benjamin Campbell, British Consul at Lagos in 1853-59. Before his appointment to Lagos, Campbell had been for many years a trader in Sierra Leone, where there had been a major rebellion of slaves, under a leader called Bilali, among the Susu of the interior in the 1830s. According to Campbell, this slave rebellion was a consequence of the rise of 'legitimate' trade (in this area, in groundnuts rather than palm oil):

*The cultivation of the ground-nut not requiring great manual labour, all classes participate in it; even the unfortunate slaves found means to cultivate them unknown to their masters, and they also found opportunities to sell the produce of their secret labour,*

and with the wealth obtained through this trade the slaves had purchased guns, thus making successful rebellion feasible.<sup>13</sup> Campbell observed an analogous process of liberation, albeit peaceful rather than violent, at work in Lagos itself: in 1854, for example, he reported that

*whereas during the Slave Trade time, that horrid traffic being confined to the King, his Chiefs and principal people, they were all under the necessity of feeding their*

numerous slaves and dependants; now, all these of an adult age are able, by trading in palm oil and other articles, to maintain themselves;

and again in 1858,

*All these [slave] people are now working or trading for themselves . . . It is the women that trade at the oil markets, and many of them by care and frugality soon amass sufficient courtes to pay a heavy sum for the redemption of themselves and their children,*

though he also noted that slave-owners were often unwilling to allow their slaves to purchase their freedom.<sup>14</sup> Campbell believed that the new trade was also having similar effects in the Yoruba interior, from which the oil was brought to Lagos: thus in 1856 he reported with satisfaction that with the increasing oil trade 'if the revenues derived from it do not satisfy all the old slave trading Chiefs, the profits of the lawful traffic amply compensate the masses of the population who are now engaged in it', and predicted that the progress of the oil trade would necessarily improve the conditions of domestic slaves in the interior.<sup>15</sup>

Campbell's optimism was, however, tempered by a fear that the existing rulers would use their political power to obstruct this process of liberation. In 1859, for example, when the king of Ijebu, north-east of Lagos, interdicted the passage of oil to Lagos, reportedly in an attempt to force the restoration of the slave trade and in collusion with the rulers of the other major Yoruba states, Campbell opined that

*the present hostile movement against the palm oil trade is evidently a combination of the Slave Trade Chiefs, who are unfortunately able to put in force the frightfully despotic powers they possess, to put down a commerce which, although it may bring them but little revenue, they evidently perceive is elevating the position of the masses of the population over whom they have hitherto exercised such despotic way.*

In the same year also, the king of Porto-Novo, west of Lagos, attempted to enforce a monopoly of the palm oil trade, requiring the manufacturers in the interior to sell their produce to 'the King's wives and Chiefs' at a fixed price: in explanation to Campbell, the King complained that 'the British and other traders now gave the makers of the oil so extravagant a price for it, that the Chiefs who bought oil from the makers to sell again could make no profit on it'. At Campbell's insistence, however, this attempt to defend the interests of the ruling establishment by administrative interference in the market was abandoned, and a free trade again restored.<sup>16</sup>

Further east, a similar picture of the liberating tendencies of 'legitimate' trade, but also of their obstruction by existing rulers, was presented by Thomas Hutchinson, British Consul for the Bight of Biafra in 1855-60. At Bonny in the Niger Delta, at Old Calabar, and at Duala in the Cameroons, he noted, 'men who before were liable to be seized and sold any day in the market . . . are becoming independent traders . . . those who were formerly slaves . . . are the most active and honest barterers to be found in the oil markets'; but at the same time, 'the kings and chiefs wishing to keep these men down, and they not seeing why they should not reap the benefits of legitimate traffic in their own country, the despotism of African monarchs is thereby sometimes called into operation'.<sup>17</sup> In 1856, indeed, Hutchinson predicted 'revolutions in the principal African kingdoms' as a consequence of these tensions.<sup>18</sup> In Bonny, in fact, King William Dappa Pepple had already been deposed in 1854 and, following the death of his successor after a brief reign, a regency council comprising chiefs of slave origin had been set up in 1855 (though in the event, this was to last only for a few years, King William Dappa Pepple being restored

to the throne in 1861). In Old Calabar, according to Hutchinson, the freemen maintained their authority through their domination of the governing Egbo (or Ekpe) society, a secret cult organisation from the senior grades of which slaves were excluded,<sup>19</sup> and similar cult groups existed in Duala also. In 1858 Hutchinson himself witnessed a challenge to the authority of the ruling freemen of Duala by slaves organised in a cult group of their own, which among other demands sought to enforce the payment by masters of a standard commission to slaves engaged in the purchase of oil in the interior.<sup>20</sup>

The testimony of such contemporary observers is not, of course, by itself decisive evidence in favour of the thesis of Dike and Hopkins. In the first place, contemporary European witnesses were not altogether unanimous. A more pessimistic view of social developments in the Niger Delta was put forward, for example, by Richard Burton, Hutchinson's successor as Consul for the Bight of Biafra (1861-64), who told the House of Commons Select Committee on the Western Coast of Africa in 1865 that, far from tending towards the liberation of the slaves, the end of the overseas slave trade and the rise of oil exports had strengthened the institution of domestic slavery (slaves being now, with the collapse of overseas demand, cheaper to acquire, as well as in greater demand for employment in the oil trade), and that despite the existence of a few favoured 'head slaves' the condition of the generality of 'the common slaves' had in fact deteriorated:

*the demand for domestic slavery has increased, which tends greatly to the misery of the slaves . . . they can now be bought for a few shillings where formerly they cost a dollar, or a pound . . . it is worth while for a naive gentleman to buy those men at a cheap rate, and work or starve them to death in a few months to buy others.<sup>21</sup>*

If Dike and Hopkins can cite the evidence of Consuls Hutchinson and Campbell, Ajayi can appeal against them to that of Consul Burton. Moreover, it seems clear that observers such as Campbell and Hutchinson were influenced in their understanding of events by preconceived assumptions about the liberating effects of 'legitimate' commerce, which they may well have imposed in a Procrustean fashion upon the events which they reported. More generally, as Ajayi has pertinently pointed out in a different context, European observers, being mainly concerned with the promotion of trade, tended unreflectingly to project a similar primacy of commercial causation upon African societies also.<sup>22</sup> The tendency to classify West African rulers into reactionary supporters of the slave trade and progressive champions of 'legitimate' commerce, and to interpret African opposition to European policies in terms of the support for the slave trade, often reflected European prejudice and incomprehension rather than African realities. Nevertheless, these contemporary perceptions can usefully be taken as a starting point in the debate, as presenting an interpretation which, although it need not be accepted and must in any case be treated critically, at least warrants serious consideration.

## The development of the modern debate

### *The 'rise of the new men' in the coastal middleman states*

As noted earlier, the first modern scholar to attempt serious analysis of the political and social consequences of the nineteenth-century commercial transition was Professor Dike, who discussed principally the case of the Ijo state of Bonny, in the eastern Niger Delta. Dike's main emphasis was upon the rise to positions of leadership of men of slave extraction, which he presented as closely connected with the rise of trade in palm oil. Bonny

comprised a number of 'Houses', whose heads formed a Council which governed in conjunction with the king. The headship of Houses was originally hereditary in the families of their founders, but by the mid-nineteenth century House headships had become elective rather than hereditary, and the heads of many of the most important Bonny Houses were men of slave origin or descent. According to Dike, this process had begun under King Opubo (1792-1830), who on his accession to the throne had conferred the headship of his own House (and thereby membership of the governing Council of Bonny) upon a certain Madu, in origin a slave from the Igbo interior. After Opubo's death in 1830, while the kingship passed to his son William Dappa Pepple, control of his House (usually known as the Anna Pepple House) remained in the hands of the ex-slave Madu, and after Madu's own death in 1833 passed to his son Alali.<sup>23</sup> From the 1830s to the 1860s Bonny politics revolved around the competition for power between the monarchy and the Anna Pepple House. Initially, King William Dappa Pepple being a minor, Madu (and after his death, his son Alali) ruled Bonny as regent, but in 1837 British intervention secured the deposition of Alali from the regency, and William Dappa Pepple was able to assume effective authority. In 1854, however, the Bonny chiefs, led by Alali, in turn invoked British intervention to effect the deposition and exile of William Dappa Pepple. There followed, in 1855, a civil war in which the ex-king's House was destroyed, and the installation of a Regency Council of four chiefs including Alali. The regency, however, proved divided and ineffective, and William Dappa Pepple was restored to the throne in 1861. On Alali's death in 1863, the headship of the Anna Pepple House passed to Jaja, who like Madu was in origin an Igbo slave from the interior. In 1869 there was a second civil war between the supporters of the monarchy and the Anna Pepple House, after which Jaja succeeded with his followers from Bonny to found the new state of Opobo, of which Jaja himself became king.

Dike interpreted the political divisions in Bonny as reflecting a conflict between the old ruling class of free men and 'the new class of ex-slaves rising with the developing trade in oil'. The civil wars of 1855 and 1869 were thus characterised in class terms, as 'slave revolts'. Having risen to prominence through the oil trade, the ex-slaves demanded a political position commensurate with their wealth and importance: 'a change in the economy of the city-states demanded a corresponding change in the political institutions which the free classes were reluctant to effect'.<sup>24</sup> Despite the resistance of the 'free classes' within Bonny, the social revolution was eventually consummated by Jaja, who by succeeding to found Opobo was able to complete the transition from slave to king, and whose career thus symbolised the final achievement of legitimate political authority by a representative of the rising ex-slave class. This analysis, it may be noted, did little more than reproduce the contemporary interpretation of Consul Hutchinson, quoted earlier in this essay. Dike in effect merely filled out Hutchinson's account with greater detail, rather than offering any new original interpretation.

Although Dike discussed in detail only the case of Bonny, he evidently believed, like Hutchinson earlier, that the rise of the ex-slaves was a general phenomenon in the coastal middleman states of the Niger Delta area. Subsequent research tended to corroborate this: in Elem Kalabari (New Calabar), another Ijo state of the eastern Delta, for example, the leading chiefs and traders in the 1870s, George Amakiri and Will Braid, were both of slave extraction; Will Braid even attempted to emulate Jaja of Opobo by succeeding with his followers from New Calabar in 1879.<sup>25</sup> A similar process of upward social mobility, albeit on a more restricted scale, could also be traced in the Efik state of Old Calabar, east of the Delta.<sup>26</sup> In the early nineteenth century, King Duke Ephraim of Old Calabar had employed favoured slaves as his principal trading agents, and after his death in 1834, although the formal political leadership of his 'ward' passed to his free relatives, the most successful and wealthy traders in Duke Ward were drawn from the late king's former

slaves. Contrary to the assertion of Consul Hutchinson, by the 1860s the most prominent of these ex-slaves, Black Davis and Yellow Duke, had even achieved entry into the highest grades of the governing Ekpe society.<sup>27</sup> The parallel with developments in Bonny, however, was not complete, since in the 1870s and 1880s the leading freemen of Duke Ward succeeded in reasserting their dominance, by claiming inheritance of the estates of the wealthy ex-slaves upon their deaths. The situation in Old Calabar was also complicated by a phenomenon of little importance in Bonny, the large-scale employment of slaves on agricultural plantations in the hinterland of the town. It was, again, King Duke Ephraim in the early nineteenth century who initiated the establishment of such slave plantations; in the following generation, similar plantations were established by King Eyo Honesty II (d. 1858), of the Creek Town section of Calabar. In the 1850s there were serious disturbances among these plantation slaves, who began to organise themselves by a form of blood pact to resist the oppression of the freemen, and in particular to oppose the sacrifice of slaves at the funerals of prominent Calabar chiefs: insurrections of such 'Blood Men' occurred, for example, in Duke Ward in 1851-52 and in Creek Town at the death of King Eyo Honesty in 1858. One of the ex-slaves influential in Duke Ward politics in the 1850s and 1860s, George Duke, was a leader of these farm-slaves rather than a trader; and Eyo Okun, who became the real power in Creek Town after 1858, was also a leader of the 'Blood Men'.<sup>28</sup> The rising importance of such farm-slaves, however, could plausibly be presented as at least broadly analogous to the emergence of wealthy traders of slave origin such as Jaja, George Amakiri, and Yellow Duke. Already Dike had suggested that, despite the obvious differences, the insurrection of the Calabar 'Blood Men' in 1851 might be regarded as forming, together with the Bonny 'slave revolts' of 1855 and 1859, two 'sections' of a single movement of liberation.<sup>29</sup>

What seemed to be comparable developments took place also in the Itsekiri kingdom of Warri, in the western Niger Delta.<sup>30</sup> Here following the death of King Akengbuwa in 1848, and that of his heir apparent, Omateye, a few days afterwards, another of his sons, Ejo, succeeded to the throne but also died after a very brief reign. The slaves of Omateye and Ejo then seized control in the capital and prevented the installation of any other prince as king. A period of anarchy followed, in which the monarchy lapsed, leaving a political vacuum in which rival leaders competed for commercial and political predominance: in the 1850s these rival chiefs included a former royal slave, called Ebrimoni, as well as princes of the royal house and free commoners. Titular headship of the Itsekiri community was vested, after 1851, in the non-hereditary office of 'Governor', which was held successively by three of the most prominent trader chiefs, Idiare (1851-70), Tsanomi (1870-79) and Olomu (1879-83); but on Olomu's death in 1883 his position was inherited by his son Nana (1883-94). The involvement of the former royal slaves under Ebrimoni in the Itsekiri factional struggles of the 1850s clearly lent itself to interpretation along class lines, such as Consul Hutchinson (and, following him, Professor Dike) had applied to the politics of Bonny. Already in 1858, indeed, Consul Campbell, visiting the area, described the Governor Idiare as 'a representative of the Old Slave Trade Chiefs' opposed by Ebrimoni and 'the class of people emancipated from slavery'.<sup>31</sup> In the historical literature of the 1960s, under the influence of Dike, the seizure of power by the Itsekiri royal slaves in 1848 was likewise interpreted, at least initially, as analogous to the 'slave revolts' of the eastern Delta, and as reflecting the slaves' desire for 'political changes which would reflect to some extent the economic worth of the slave class'.<sup>32</sup> The 'slave revolt' in Itsekiri had, of course, to be regarded as only temporarily successful, since political leadership there passed ultimately not to ex-slaves such as Ebrimoni, but to men who, although commoners in status, belonged to the old political elite — Idiare and Olomu both tracing descent from a traditional chiefly family, and Tsanomi even (albeit in the female line) from the royal dynasty. Although not of servile or even of humble origin, however,

Idiare and Olomu could be thought of as more loosely resembling Jaja and the ex-slave chiefs of Bonny in being essentially self-made men, who owed their political influence to their wealth and ability rather than to traditional hereditary office.

In an influential general text-book published in 1967, Bertin Webster and Adu Boahen drew together these apparently similar cases to present a geographically generalised version of Dike's interpretation, tracing 'social disruption of revolutionary proportions' throughout the Niger Delta and in Old Calabar to the east. Although this 'social revolution' differed from community to community both in the detailed form which it took and the extent to which it was carried, a common element in all cases was provided by 'the rise of the new men', including both ex-slaves such as Jaja and freeborn commoners like Nana, to challenge or displace the existing hereditary rulers. Even more emphatically than Dike, Webster and Boahen linked this process to the commercial transition: 'As the slave trade declined it carried the nobility down with it, and as palm-oil became important it carried the new men to wealth and power.'<sup>33</sup> Although powerfully and eloquently expressed, however, this exposition, in common with that of Dike earlier, left some key connections in the argument obscure. In particular, it was not made wholly clear *how* the transition from the slave trade to the oil trade was supposed to have favoured the rise of the 'new men' at the expense of the existing rulers. There is no difficulty in accepting that, as Professor Ajayi among others had already suggested, the shift from slave to oil exports led to a substantial increase in the slave population of the coastal states. The sheer physical volumes to be transported in the oil trade were immensely greater than in the slave trade: in the Delta in the 1830s, it was reckoned that a single slave commanded the same price as a ton (i.e. 320 gallons) of oil.<sup>34</sup> The trade in oil therefore required a much greater labour force to man an increased number of trading canoes, and traders had now to incorporate much larger numbers of domestic slaves into their households.<sup>35</sup> In the case of Old Calabar, the expansion of *agricultural* slavery could also be linked directly to the shift to the oil trade, on the supposition that the slave plantations there were established to produce palm oil for export.<sup>36</sup> While these factors may account for the incorporation of slaves on a larger scale into the coastal societies during the nineteenth century, however, they do not in themselves explain the increased *upward social mobility* of slaves within those societies, except perhaps in so far as the increasing numerical disproportion between the slave and free elements in the population may have increased the pressure upon the latter to make concessions to the former. The argument seems to require a further assumption, which was in fact explicitly formulated in the study of Old Calabar by Kannan Nair published in 1972 (as well as by Consul Campbell and others in the nineteenth century), that the trade in oil opened up greater possibilities of *small-scale* trading, which provided opportunities to those hitherto excluded from direct participation in the export trade. It thus became possible for those without inherited riches, including even slaves, to accumulate wealth, initially by petty trading, and if successful to advance into large-scale operations in competition with the established traders:

*The trade in oil, unlike the trade in slaves, was non-capital-intensive. Wealth became an attribute of individual enterprise in that it could be acquired by all and sundry . . . The oil trade permitted wealth to be made and diffused among a larger group, and by the most able rather than by those who owed their wealth to their noble status.*<sup>37</sup>

## Chiefs, slaves, and 'peasants' in the hinterland producing states

As propounded by Webster and Boahen in 1967, the thesis of a commercially induced 'social revolution' was still applied only to the coastal middleman states of the Niger Delta and Old Calabar. They had less to say about the implications of the commercial transition for the societies in the interior of West Africa, which were engaged in the actual *production* rather than merely the marketing of the new agricultural commodities. In large part, of course, this reflected the fact that down to the 1960s historical research had been mainly concentrated upon the coastal states, and there was still relatively little published literature relating to the hinterland. The only case of a hinterland state for which Webster and Boahen were able to discuss the consequences of the transition from slaves to palm oil in any detail was the kingdom of Dahomey, and here they presented a very different picture from that offered for the coastal states, stressing continuity rather than change.<sup>38</sup> Dahomey was generally regarded as an unusually centralised and autocratic monarchy, in which rigorous state control was exercised over economic activities, including agricultural production as well as overseas trade.<sup>39</sup> Webster and Boahen argued that this tradition of administrative centralisation enabled King Gezo of Dahomey (1818-58) to cope effectively with the problems posed by the commercial transition, by 'a planned economy' in which the state consciously promoted palm oil production as a substitute for the declining slave trade. Gezo produced oil for export on his own estates, and encouraged production by his officials and subjects also. Although small farmers played some part in the oil trade, the main emphasis was on large-scale production, using slave labour, on plantations owned by the king and the chiefs. The Dahomian army continued to be employed in raiding for slaves, in order to supply the requisite labour for this expanding oil production. Heavy taxation (one third of output) was levied on private oil production. In Dahomey, therefore, according to Webster and Boahen, the effect of the transition to the oil trade was to *intensify* political centralisation, to strengthen rather than to undermine the existing state structure. They clearly regarded Dahomey, however, both in its high level of state regulation of the economy and in its development of intensive plantation agriculture, as exceptional rather than typical of West African responses to the commercial transition. They also expressed some doubt about how successful these policies proved in the long term, citing evidence for the impoverishment of the Dahomian monarchy under Gezo's successor, Glele (1858-89) which suggested that the new trade had ultimately failed to yield an adequate level of revenue.

During the 1960s, however, the idea that the transition from slaves to palm oil had had a disintegrative and destabilising effect upon West African political structures began to be applied to the oil-producing societies in the hinterland as well as to the coastal trading states. The first geographical extension of the argument was, in fact, into the immediate hinterland of the Niger Delta, into the Igbo country, which supplied most of the slaves and palm oil sold through Bonny and Calabar. The slave trade in Igboland had been largely monopolised by the Aro, whose influence was based on the oracle shrine at Arochuku. G. I. Jones, however, in a work devoted to the Delta middleman states published in 1963, suggested that the Aro were unable to monopolise the palm oil trade in the same way, because unlike the slave trade the production and marketing of oil were readily open to local competition: 'the oil could be produced by anyone who had access to the trees and traded in by anyone who could find the cash to buy it or who could obtain it on credit'.<sup>40</sup> This analysis was endorsed and elaborated in a more substantial study of trade in Igboland by U. I. Ukwu, published in 1967:

*The supply market for palm produce . . . is ubiquitous while that for slaves depended on a high degree of organisation and co-ordination . . . Masses of producers and small*

*traders outside the Aro system could and did take their palm produce direct to the water-side ports.*<sup>41</sup>

The Aro could not, of course, be regarded as having suffered a total collapse of their trading system, since their regional hegemony remained largely intact until they were conquered by the British colonial invaders in 1902. In large part, their successful survival reflected the persistence of the *internal* market for slaves even after the suppression of the overseas trade; for the Aro, indeed, the decline of the trans-Atlantic slave trade was at least in part counterbalanced by the expansion of demand for slaves for domestic use, both in the coastal states and in Igboland itself, to supply the increased labour required by the new trade in oil. But a consensus emerged that Aro power had been seriously undermined by the commercial transition of the nineteenth century, and was therefore in decline even before the British conquest.<sup>42</sup>

A more critical step in the development of the argument was represented by an article on late nineteenth-century Yorubaland by Tony Hopkins, published in 1968.<sup>43</sup> Hopkins was mainly concerned to defend a reformulated theory of 'economic imperialism', arguing that British colonial expansion in West Africa in the late nineteenth century was a response to the difficulties created for British traders there by the 'Great Depression' of 1873-96, and more particularly that the extension of British rule over Yorubaland in 1892-93 was intended to bring an end to the protracted war among the leading Yoruba states which had been going on since 1877, and whose persistence was held to constitute a major obstacle to commercial progress. In the process, however, he also offered an explanation of the Yoruba wars of the late nineteenth century, which he linked to the commercial transition from slaves to palm oil. In Yorubaland, as elsewhere in West Africa, the slave trade had encouraged the dominance of a 'warrior class', who gained much of their income through the sale of slaves captured in their military operations. For these warrior chiefs the decline of the slave trade, by undermining one of their principal sources of income, posed a very serious 'crisis of adaptation'. The new trade in oil, unlike the slave trade, was open to participation by the generality of ordinary farmers, who could produce and market the oil in small quantities. 'The trade in palm produce... was one in which there were few barriers to entry, since the trees grew in abundance, access to them was relatively unrestricted, and capital requirements were minimal.' (In this analysis, it may be noted, Hopkins was clearly influenced by the contemporary observations of Consul Campbell, quoted earlier in this essay.)<sup>44</sup> The warrior chiefs could and did themselves enter the palm oil trade, employing slave labour to produce oil for export, but since there were 'no significant economies of scale' in the production of oil, such large-scale enterprises enjoyed no competitive advantages over the mass of small producers. The chiefs could also exploit their political and military power to tax the trade of the small-scale producers of oil, and more generally to appropriate wealth through tribute and plunder. Overall, however, Hopkins argued that the chiefs faced a serious erosion of their incomes, which was greatly exacerbated by the collapse of oil prices during the 'Great Depression', which squeezed the profit margins of African suppliers as well as of European traders. On Hopkins's interpretation, the endemic warfare which characterised Yorubaland in the 1880s and 1890s was fuelled by the necessity for the Yoruba warlords to bolster their declining incomes through booty and tribute. Inasmuch as this represented an anarchistic survival into the era of 'legitimate' commerce of a mode of life founded in the slave trade, the Yoruba wars could be regarded, Hopkins suggested, as an illustration of Schumpeter's theory of 'imperialism' (in the sense of militarism) as 'an atavism in the social structure stemming from past rather than present relations of production'. Since the wars in turn provoked the establishment of British rule over Yorubaland in the 1890s, the British 'economic imperialism' of the late nineteenth century could be seen

as a consequence of the ultimate failure of the rulers of the Yoruba states to cope successfully (or more precisely, in ways acceptable to British capitalism) with the strains of the commercial transition.

The publication of Hopkins's article provoked a strongly worded rebuttal from Professor Ajayi (co-authored with Ralph Austen), which disputed his explanations both of British imperialism and of the Yoruba wars.<sup>45</sup> The main thrust of Ajayi's critique was to contest the legitimacy of any sort of economic explanation of the nineteenth-century Yoruba wars. Ajayi had already, in his study of the Ijaye War of the 1860s, argued that the commercial motivations imputed to the policies of the Yoruba states by contemporary European observers were mistaken, and that the central issue in the Yoruba wars was essentially political: specifically, they arose from the competition among the major Yoruba states to inherit the hegemony formerly enjoyed by the kingdom of Oyo, which had disintegrated in the 1820s.<sup>46</sup> He now insisted that this analysis was as applicable to the 1880s as to the 1860s. But he also reaffirmed his own view that, in any case, the shift from slaves to palm oil had effected 'no revolution in [the] Yoruba social and economic system'.

By the time Ajayi's critique appeared in print, however, research on another area of West Africa had been published which tended to corroborate Hopkins's view that there were significant structural differences between the slave and 'legitimate' trades. Martin Klein, in his study of Senegambia published in 1968, suggested that, there also, while the slave trade had been dominated by the ruling class of warriors (the *tyeddó*), the trade in agricultural produce (in this area, groundnuts) which replaced it involved ordinary 'peasants', so that the income from the overseas trade now became 'much more widely distributed', and the peasants as well as the warriors obtained access to imported European firearms.<sup>47</sup> In an article published in 1971, Klein drew explicit attention to the parallel between this analysis and that offered by Hopkins, though without indicating whether he thought that it could be generalised beyond the cases of Senegambia and Yorubaland.<sup>48</sup> Klein believed that this shift in the distribution of wealth (and more critically, of ownership of firearms) within Senegambian society had facilitated the successful insurrection against the rule of the *tyeddó* by the Muslim leader Ma Ba in the 1860s. In a second article specifically devoted to the social and economic background to this 'Muslim Revolution' he elaborated the argument, in terms reminiscent of Consul Campbell's observations on the Susu slave rebellion led by Bilali: 'Whereas the slave trade strengthened the elite, the peanut trade put money, and thus guns, in the hands of peasants.'<sup>49</sup>

Other research of this period was more ambivalent in its implications. A study of Dahomey by David Ross (1967) (regrettably never published in its entirety, and therefore less influential than it warranted) confirmed and elaborated the picture of state control of the oil trade there, showing that King Gezo even proclaimed an official royal monopoly of oil exports in 1852. It also, however, showed that the transition from slaves to oil was less smooth than Webster and Boahen had supposed, since the growth of slavery on the oil plantations posed problems of social control (reflected in a panic over a plotted slave rebellion in 1852), and that Gezo's progressive policies were partially repudiated by his successor Gleté, who attempted to revive the slave trade.<sup>50</sup> A second study by Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch (1971) did corroborate Hopkins's analysis to the extent of showing that the official royal monopoly of commerce in Dahomey was more nominal than real and that the palm oil trade there, as in Yorubaland, involved not only the king and chiefs, employing slave labour on large-scale plantations, but also 'a mass of small traders', mainly women, who marketed the produce of the ordinary 'peasants'. Her account also, however, offered some comfort for Ajayi, since she nevertheless stressed the essential continuity of Dahomian commercial organisation during the nineteenth century, insisting explicitly



that 'there was no radical subversion of structures' and that Dahomey, far from being destabilised by the transition, remained 'a relatively balanced country, with a strong political regime' down to the French colonial conquest in the 1890s.<sup>51</sup>

The situation in Asante, as studied by Ivor Wilks (1971) and Kwame Arhin (1970), appeared to be similar to that in Dahomey. In one respect, Asante's response to the decline of the Atlantic slave trade was very different from that of Dahomey, since being situated to the north of the coastal belt in which the oil palms grew, it was for most of the nineteenth century unable to participate directly in the export of agricultural produce to Europe. (Only in the 1880s and 1890s, with the development of European demand for rubber, which grew wild in the Asante area, did it fully enter the new economy of 'legitimate' commerce.) Asante did continue to trade with the Europeans at the coast, in order to secure its essential supplies of imported firearms, but prior to the 1880s this trade was in gold and ivory rather than in agricultural produce. Asante was able, however, to offset the loss of income from the declining Atlantic trade by developing its trade with the West African interior, primarily in kola nuts, which expanded substantially during the nineteenth century. Although this northern trade was directed towards an African rather than a European market, it was, like the palm oil trade to Europe, in agricultural produce, and Hopkins's analysis should, therefore, in principle be equally applicable to it. Wilks, however, insisted that the Asante state was able to maintain a 'high degree of bureaucratic control' over the kola trade.<sup>52</sup> The emphasis of Arhin's work was differently placed, stressing that the kola trade was open to 'all and sundry' and documenting the involvement in it of farmers marketing their own produce and professional traders as well as state officials, but he confirmed that the state traders had the privilege of selling off their kola first, before any private trade was allowed, thus enjoying a sort of 'temporary monopoly' of the market. The position with regard to the actual production of kola was less clear, but it appeared that chiefs employing slave labour as well as ordinary farmers were involved.<sup>53</sup> Like Dahomey also, the Asante state did not suffer collapse during the nineteenth century (although there were serious civil wars in the 1880s), but survived until conquered by the British in the 1890s.

When Hopkins came to write his general *Economic History of West Africa*, published in 1973, he nevertheless felt able to generalise his analysis of the commercial 'crisis of adaptation' and its relationship to late nineteenth-century European imperialism from the case of Yorubaland to West Africa as a whole.<sup>54</sup> The discontinuity between the economic structures associated with the slave trade and with 'legitimate' commerce in agricultural produce was once more stressed: through the entry of 'small-scale farmers and traders' into the overseas exchange economy for the first time, the development of the latter 'marked an important break with the past' which, since West African economies continued down to the present to be based upon the export of agricultural produce predominantly grown by small farmers, could be regarded as being 'the start of the modern economic history of West Africa'. The 'acute problems of adaptation' which this commercial transition posed for the rulers of West African states, and the varying strategies they adopted in response to them, were again delineated: drawing upon the published research surveyed above, illustrative material was cited from throughout West Africa, from Senegambia through Asante, Dahomey and Yorubaland to the Igbo, Isekiri, Bonny and Old Calabar. Rulers employed slaves in export production, sought to tax the wealth of independent producers, or resorted to crude plunder, but whatever expedients they adopted, according to Hopkins, they found their economic, and hence often also their political, position eroded. At the same time, the very 'modes of adaptation' adopted by West African rulers involved the perpetuation or intensification of conditions and practices which Europeans regarded as archaic and obstructive of the healthy development of commerce: in some areas (as in Yorubaland) endemic warfare and disorder, but more generally the use of slave labour,

commercial monopolies and the levying of tolls on trade. The problems of the transition thus led on to the European partition of West Africa. The trade depression of 1873-96 brought a crisis in Afro-European relations which precipitated the partition, because it increased the urgency of European demands for the reform of West African economic structures, while at the same time by further undermining the incomes of West African rulers it reduced their capacity and willingness to contemplate any further concessions in this field.

Hopkins's *Economic History*, with its exciting and elegantly argued generalisations, has been rightly held in high regard, and exercised a profound influence upon subsequent theorisation of and research upon West African history. The very scope of its generalisations, however, made them highly vulnerable to the test of future detailed research. Its interpretation of the commercial transition of the nineteenth century, in fact, was already looking difficult to sustain by the time of its publication. By 1973, Professor Dike's interpretation, elaborated by Webster and Boahen and taken over by Hopkins, of the social and political consequences of the commercial transition in the coastal trading states was already in considerable disarray. The historiographical fortunes of Hopkins's own analysis of the political and social tensions created within the hinterland producing societies were to prove rather happier, but it survived through the progressive incorporation of qualification and complexity rather than being straightforwardly vindicated.

### 'Social revolution' in the coastal states reconsidered

Already in the 1960s, Dike's interpretation of the political history of Bonny during the nineteenth century in class terms, as reflecting the conflict between a freeborn ruling elite and a class of ex-slaves rising with the new trade in palm oil, had been put in serious question by the work of the anthropologist G. I. Jones.<sup>55</sup> Although Jones acknowledged that there was a social distinction in Bonny between those Houses which had remained under hereditary free leadership (which were called *ahowari*) and those under slave leadership (called *opwawari*) and that the latter were indeed larger and wealthier than the former, he regarded this as irrelevant to the course of Bonny politics. He argued that the political struggles in Bonny, including the civil wars of 1855 and 1869, revolved around factional rather than class conflict, between the two leading Houses of Bonny, the Mamilla Pepple House (which supported the monarch) and the Anna Pepple House. Jones also showed that the Mamilla Pepple House as well as the Anna Pepple House was derived from the royal household — the former being in origin the house of King Opubo's brother and predecessor Fubara (d. 1792), as the latter was that of Opubo himself — and that the former as well as the latter was under slave leadership throughout the nineteenth century, implying that both factions in the conflict had a similar social character. According to Jones, the division between them was best understood in terms of a cyclical pattern of political development characteristic of 'segmentary' societies, based on the principle of 'binary division', in which any unit which expanded unduly in size (as the royal household had evidently done) would tend to segment into two.

Jones's analysis was subsequently endorsed by the historian E. J. Alagoa, who used it explicitly to contest Dike's characterisation of the disturbances of 1855 and 1869 as 'slave revolts'.<sup>56</sup> Ralph Austen, in his article of 1970, made the same point, and also disputed Dike's assertion that the ex-slaves had risen in Bonny in association with the oil trade, arguing that the promotion of slaves to positions of leadership had begun already in the period of the slave trade. Austen pointed out, indeed, that Dike's own account showed that in the 1830s it was King William Dappa Pepple who advocated compliance

with British measures to suppress the slave trade, whereas the ex-slave Alali championed Bonny's right to continue to sell slaves: it was precisely for this reason that the British intervened to depose Alali from the regency in 1837. At most, therefore, it could be argued that the greater organisational problems involved in the oil trade *accelerated* the upward mobility of slaves, by increasing the pressures to promote men of ability to positions of leadership regardless of their social origins.<sup>57</sup> Other evidence showed, indeed, that Dike had been in error in believing that the rise of ex-slaves to House headships in Bonny had begun only in the time of King Opubo in 1792-1830. According to Bonny tradition the first such elevation of an ex-slave had occurred in the reign of King Perekule, the father of Fubara and Opubo, in the middle or early eighteenth century, and therefore long before the rise of the trade in palm oil.<sup>58</sup>

Similar revisionist points could be made with respect to the other coastal states. In Itsekiri also, for example, the so-called 'slave revolt' of 1848 was more plausibly understood as an intervention in the factional politics of the capital than as a class uprising against the disabilities associated with slave status, since it involved only the slaves of the two recently deceased princes, and sought to advance the interests of the branch of the royal family to which they belonged (by preventing the succession to the vacant throne of any other branch) rather than of slaves in general.<sup>59</sup> It was difficult, in any case, to link these events with the transition from slaves to palm oil: although the collapse of the Itsekiri monarchy had been preceded by a period in which its authority had already been seriously eroded, and changing patterns of trade had played some part in this decline, these involved mainly a *geographical* shift of the main centre of trade away from the royal capital inland to settlements further down-river which pre-dated the development of the oil trade.<sup>60</sup> In the case of Old Calabar, the 'Blood Men' seemed to provide more convincing examples of 'slave revolts'; though even here John Latham (1973) argued that the celebrated 'revolts' of the Duke Ward plantation slaves in 1851-52 were as much concerned with factional politics (supporting the Duke Ward freemen against the rival Eyamba Ward) as with defending the class interests of slaves. The presumed connection of the growth of plantation slavery in Calabar with the oil trade, however, was contested by Latham, who showed that these plantations produced foodstuffs rather than oil; so that their establishment could be linked to the oil trade, if at all, only indirectly, the plantations providing the provisions for the increased labour force employed in the transportation of oil.<sup>61</sup> Latham also argued that in Old Calabar, as in Bonny, ex-slaves had risen to positions of leadership even before the development of the palm oil trade, though the evidence on this point was not wholly convincing.<sup>62</sup>

Factional rather than class conflict, continuity rather than revolutionary change thus became the new orthodoxy with regard to the nineteenth-century history of the coastal trading states in the 1970s, as expressed for example in the general text-book of West African history by Elizabeth Isichei (1977).<sup>63</sup> The various revisions which this involved, however, while discrediting the concept of a 'social revolution' promoted by the oil trade as propounded by Dike and by Webster and Boahen, did not altogether destroy the notion that the shift from slaves to palm oil tended, in a general way, to promote the upward mobility of 'new men', and the relevant reservations were in fact incorporated by Hopkins into his account in the *Economic History*.<sup>64</sup> There was, however, simultaneously a much more subversive line of revisionist interpretation, which disputed one of the central elements in Hopkins's analysis, by denying that the oil trade, in practice, opened up the opportunities for small-scale trading which his thesis posited.

It was, empirically, difficult to contest the fact that in the coastal middleman states the oil trade, like the slave trade earlier, was predominantly conducted as a large-scale enterprise. Although the oil might be purchased ultimately from a multiplicity of small-scale producers in the interior, it was normally bulked up *before* it was brought to the coast.

An account of the 1830s, for example, reported that the oil was initially 'collected in small grounds, each capable of containing from two to four gallons', but was then 'emptied into trade puncheons [160-gallon barrels] carried by the Bonny trading canoes'.<sup>65</sup> Even if, as Hopkins argued, there were no economies of scale in the actual production of the oil, there clearly were such economies in its transportation by canoe along the inland waterways, so that trading on a large scale yielded lower unit costs. Large-scale traders also had an advantage, as Professor Ajayi had pointed out, through their access to 'trust' from the European merchants. Europeans extended credit only to those whom they knew to be credit-worthy, which normally meant the already established large traders; a 'new man' could thus only expect to get credit through the recommendation of an established trader.<sup>66</sup> The argument that the oil trade was by its nature highly competitive was also difficult to reconcile with the fact that in the two key areas of Bonny and Itsekiri the end-result of the commercial changes of the nineteenth century had been, not the opening of the trade to greater competition but its effective *monopolisation* by a single trader, Jaja in the former and Nana in the latter.<sup>67</sup> Hopkins, in fact, gave some ground on this issue in 1973, acknowledging that in general 'the traditional unit of trade was less affected by the structural changes brought about by legitimate commerce than was the traditional unit of production', because 'large wholesalers were still necessary'. He still maintained, however, that 'legitimate commerce presented opportunities to a new generation of traders, as well as producers', who could trade on a small scale in competition with the existing wholesalers, and that this process was 'personified' by the rise of Jaja.<sup>68</sup>

Detailed research on the coastal trading states, however, found difficulty in identifying any such group of petty traders successfully competing with the existing wholesalers. Historiographically speaking, the key case was Old Calabar, which was studied by John Latham (1973) with Hopkins's analysis explicitly in mind. His conclusions were unequivocally negative: 'Petty traders . . . played an insignificant role . . . Trade remained in the hands of the Efik oligarchy, and did not pass to a competitive, individualistic group of small traders.' Accordingly, it was 'not true that the change from the slave trade to the oil trade precipitated social change by creating new groups based upon the oil trade which challenged those who had been based upon the slave trade'; such changes might have taken place in hinterland oil-producing areas, as Hopkins had suggested for Yorubaland, but 'they did not occur in Old Calabar'. Latham acknowledged, of course, that some individuals had risen from being slaves to being considerable traders, but maintained that such men 'did not advance on their own initiative from being petty traders, but as the favoured agents of their masters'.<sup>69</sup> Similar conclusions seem equally valid for the other coastal states also. Madu in Bonny, Ebrimoni in Itsekiri clearly rose through the patronage of their royal owners, not in competition with them; Jaja's advance was by promotion within an existing House, not through independent enterprise outside the House system. The initial stages in the rise of such people might indeed involve the accumulation of capital and the demonstration of commercial ability through small-scale trade, as is indicated by the account of Jaja's early trading activities in the biography of him by Sylvanus Cookey:

*His initial capital had been derived from petty trade and the 'dashies' given him by the supercargoes . . . Soon he had saved up enough to afford the initial puncheon of palm oil and requested permission from Alali, as was the custom for an ex-slave, to use the available canoe facilities in transporting his personal palm oil.*<sup>70</sup>

The 'petty trade' through which Jaja accumulated his initial capital was probably not, however, itself in oil. A visitor to Bonny in 1840, around the very time when Jaja (born in 1821) was engaged in this process of saving, reported that the slaves there sought to

accumulate capital by selling fruit; by implication, they did not trade in oil.<sup>71</sup> The smallest quantity in which oil was normally traded at Bonny was the puncheon of 160 gallons (or half a ton).

We may note, however, that to some extent the continued domination of trade by the established merchants was due to their *political* power rather than to the inherently greater efficiency of large-scale trade. For Old Calabar, Latham's work provided instances of legislative discrimination against petty traders: in 1862, after 'young men and boys' had commenced trading in oil in small quantities, the Ekpe society forbade trading 'in other than the traditional casks and puncheons', and between 1869 and 1874 the trade in palm kernels, which was 'entirely in the hands of petty traders', was banned altogether.<sup>72</sup> Other evidence from Calabar showed that the slaves employed as agents to purchase oil in the interior were not permitted to trade in oil on their own account, so that opportunities for petty trading were restricted (as in Bonny) to foodstuffs.<sup>73</sup> While clearly supporting Ajayi's stress on continuity rather than Hopkins's concept of radical structural change, the case of Old Calabar therefore also tended to corroborate the picture painted by the Consuls Campbell and Hutchinson, of the resort to 'despotic powers' by the existing rulers to deny the benefits of the new trade to 'the masses'.

It should not be lightly assumed, in any case, that the debate on 'social revolution' in the coastal middleman states is yet resolved. The recent re-examination of the history of Bonny by Susan Hargreaves (1987), for example, while endorsing current orthodoxies in certain respects, challenges them in others.<sup>74</sup> On the one hand, Hargreaves supports Latham against Hopkins in denying that the transition from slaves to oil seriously undermined the position of existing traders: on the contrary, the capital required to enter the oil trade was so great that 'it was virtually impossible for a small independent trader to exist', and a slave could become an oil trader only through the patronage of his master or House superiors. The oil trade did affect the composition of the Houses inasmuch as they had to incorporate much larger numbers of slaves in order to supply the increased labour force which it demanded, but the House heads and elders retained effective control over their subordinate members throughout the nineteenth century. On the other hand, Hargreaves goes some way towards reinstating the 'class' dimension of Bonny politics which had been stressed by Dike but contested by G. I. Jones. She argues that the major slave Houses (the *opuzuari*) were basically united in opposition to the monarchy down to the 1850s, and that it was only after the power of the monarchy had been destroyed in 1854-55 that the factional opposition between the Manilla and Anna Pepple Houses emphasised by Jones became dominant and the Manilla Pepples consequently went over to support of the King. Moreover, the houses still under free leadership (the *duozuari*) initially supported the monarchy in its resistance to the pretensions of the ex-slave House heads, in particular playing an important role in the deposition of Alali from the regency in the 1830s — though by the civil war of 1869 many of the *duozuari* were to be found on the side of Jaja against the monarchy. Further, Dike's association of the ex-slaves with the oil trade is at least partially rehabilitated, since it appears that the *duozuari* houses generally failed to move into the oil trade (or entered it late), a circumstance which indeed largely explains their relative impoverishment. The *opuzuari* houses, if they did not originate with the oil trade, do seem to have shown more flexibility and enterprise in adapting to it. In thus reopening issues which had appeared definitively closed, Hargreaves's work ensures that the argument will go on.

## Production and marketing in the hinterland revisited

The apparent collapse of Dike's analysis of the commercial transition in the coastal middleman states did not in itself refute Hopkins's analysis of the implications of the change for the producing areas of the hinterland, where the argument that opportunities for small-scale enterprise were enhanced had much greater inherent plausibility. The growing consensus that the coastal middleman trade continued to be dominated by the established large-scale traders was bound, however, to raise questions about the organisation of marketing, as opposed to production, in the interior also. The point was already taken up by Austen in 1970, who, while conceding Hopkins's claim that small producers were able to enter the new export trade in agricultural commodities, maintained that the existing state authorities could still retain their 'dominant role' through control of the marketing of the produce.<sup>75</sup> A similar counter-argument was advanced by Sara Berry (1975), with specific reference to the case of Yorubaland. Even if Hopkins was right in supposing that a significant proportion of palm oil exports was produced by small farmers, she argued, the conditions of insecurity engendered by the nineteenth-century Yoruba wars and the consequent need for trade to be conducted in large armed caravans, as well as the purely economic advantages of large-scale traders (such as access to credit from European merchants), would still have enabled large-scale entrepreneurs to dominate the sphere of distribution.<sup>76</sup> This too became part of the revisionist synthesis expounded by Isichei: even if 'ordinary individuals' did get involved in the oil trade, she asserted, 'the real profits were made by those responsible for bulking and transport, and this lay in the hands of a class of wealthy merchant princes employing slave labour'.<sup>77</sup>

By this time, despite the polemical tone of some of the exchanges between them, there was a degree of convergence between the analyses offered by Hopkins and his critics. Both sides agreed that agricultural exports were produced both by large-scale slave-owners and by small farmers, though they differed on the relative importance of these two groups; both sides agreed that existing rulers might seek to maintain their position through control of marketing and taxation of independent producers, though they differed about how effective this was likely to be in practice. There were thus sufficient common elements to form the basis for a shared framework of analysis, within which disagreements might be settled by the progress of detailed empirical research. As often, however, the accumulation of local case-studies did not provide a clear-cut answer to the question of the relative importance of large-scale and small-scale enterprise, although it did tend to confirm that both played a significant role. The study of the Gold Coast by Edward Reynolds (1974), for example, traced the development of 'mass participation' in trade and palm oil production there from the 1830s onwards, but also noted the growth of domestic slavery, presumably implying something beyond merely petty enterprise.<sup>78</sup> Reynolds held that the power of the Gold Coast chiefs had indeed been undermined by the decline of the slave trade and their relative lack of control of the new trade, but while the decline of the chiefs here was undeniable it could be argued that there were more obvious and important reasons for this than the commercial changes of the period, such as the growth of British political and judicial interference, and the impact of Western education and conversion to Christianity.<sup>79</sup> In contrast, Adam Jones (1983), in the palm produce trade of the Gaiinhas country of Sierra Leone, could find 'no evidence of "new men" emerging to challenge the established hierarchy', though he did note the increased role played by 'petty retailers' from outside the community, from the British colony of Sierra Leone.<sup>80</sup> This was not, moreover, merely a question of differences between the experience of different areas, since historians could disagree in their interpretation of a single case. For the Igbo, for example, David Northrup (1978) followed Hopkins in claiming that the palm oil trade was dominated by 'small producers and traders', and in common with earlier writers he held

that the Aro, who had monopolised the slave trade, were unable to control the new trade in oil.<sup>81</sup> But this was contradicted in a study of the Ngwa of south-eastern Igboland by J. N. Oriji (1982), who maintained that there the members of a cult society called Okonko associated with the Aro traders remained dominant in the oil trade, and even became the major producers of oil for export, employing the labour of their wives and slaves.<sup>82</sup>

The debate on these issues was, moreover, further complicated by the introduction of a factor to which Hopkins had paid little attention, the tensions between the political rulers and private merchants in West African societies.<sup>83</sup> This point was first explicitly articulated by Claude Meillassoux, in an essay published in 1971. The slave trade, Meillassoux pointed out, had depended upon and supported not one dominant class but two: although the 'military class' controlled the supply of captives for enslavement, they normally depended upon a separate group of African merchants to market them. Despite their community of interest in the slave trade, there were also tensions between warriors and merchants, since the predatory activities of the former threatened the security of commercial operations. Meillassoux argued that while the end of the overseas slave trade undermined the position of the warrior chiefs, the merchants had less difficulty in making the transition to the trade in agricultural produce, and could also move easily into the production of the new export commodities, using slave labour. The commercial transition therefore tended to heighten the tensions between the warrior chiefs and the merchants, and to strengthen the position of the latter. Meillassoux suggested that in Senegambia, where the merchant community was strongly Muslim, this shifting balance of wealth and power between chiefs and merchants, as well as the tensions between chiefs and peasants which Martin Klein had stressed, had played a role in the 'Muslim Revolution' of the 1860s.<sup>84</sup>

The detailed research of the 1970s and 1980s yielded a significant amount of material which seemed broadly consistent with Meillassoux's analysis. Reynolds's account of the Gold Coast, for example, in addition to his stress on the growth of 'mass participation' in the export trade, also traced the rise of 'an African merchant class' of wealthy traders, comprising principally men with some degree of European education, who challenged the leadership of the traditional chiefs.<sup>85</sup> In other areas of Africa this Westernised 'new elite' was of less importance, but they were paralleled by more purely indigenous groups of merchants. In Asante, for example, the researches of Ivor Wilks (1975) and Thomas Lewin (1978) suggested that one of the sources of significant opposition to the central government there during the nineteenth century came from a 'rising middle class' of wealthy entrepreneurs (*asikafo*) who resented the high levels of taxation and close bureaucratic control which the Asante state maintained over commercial activities.<sup>86</sup> Earlier, such men had sought profit principally by making loans to finance Asante military operations, but with the end of the overseas slave trade (and the consequent fall in slave prices) warfare became less profitable and they turned to non-martial forms of trade. The tensions between this group and the Asante state were heightened by the growth of rubber exports from Asante in the 1880s, which the *asikafo* pioneered, but which they feared the central government would seek to take over. The *asikafo*, according to Wilks and Lewin, formed an important element in the coalition of interests which opposed the advocates of strong central government in the Asante civil wars of 1883-88. After the victory of the centralising forces in those wars, their desire for a more liberal commercial regime drew them towards alliance with British imperialism, and they welcomed the British takeover of Asante in the 1890s.

Once historians looked for them, similar tensions seemed to be visible in the case of Dahomey also. Where earlier studies had seen the Dahomian state, or an undifferentiated elite of chiefs, as dominating trade, closer examination revealed the existence of an autonomous group of private merchants (based principally in the coastal port of Whydah)

distinct from the political and military chiefs, and suggested that it was the merchants rather than the king or the chiefs who were the first to move into large-scale palm oil production, using slave labour, in the 1840s, although the king and chiefs followed suit in the following decade.<sup>87</sup> Renewed attention was given to the divisions between progressive and reactionary factions within the Dahomian ruling elite during the 1850s, noted earlier by Ross, and particularly to arguments over the issue of human sacrifice, whose abolition was proclaimed by King Gezo in 1853 but which was revived by his successor Glele after 1858, and it was suggested that these controversies expressed tensions between upholders of Dahomey's traditional military ethos (which involved a disdain for agriculture) and advocates of more wholehearted commitment to the new economy of commercial farming — a sort of ideological reflection of the 'crisis of adaptation'.<sup>88</sup> The social and ideological contradictions engendered by the transition from slaves to palm oil have been more systematically explored and documented in the recent research of John Reid (1986), which shows that there was a material as well as an ideological incompatibility between Dahomian militarism and the palm oil trade, since the mobilisation of labour from regular campaigns undermined oil production by the withdrawal of labour from agriculture.<sup>89</sup> Consequently, in Reid's interpretation, the reaffirmation of Dahomey's traditional militarism by Glele after 1858 inevitably antagonised those committed to the new economy of commercial agriculture, including the merchant-farmers of Whydah as well as the Europeans. Much as in Asante, prominent Dahomian merchants ended up by collaborating with French imperialism.

It is by now clear, as Manning has suggested, that analysis of the implications of the commercial transition of the nineteenth century requires a more disaggregated approach than that originally proposed by Hopkins, allowing for 'the distinct interests of monarchy, landowner, merchant, and peasant' — and presumably 'warrior' also.<sup>90</sup> It also seems evident that the consequences of the shift from the slave trade to 'legitimate' commerce varied from place to place. The growth of domestic slavery, which Ajayi and Hopkins agreed in stressing, is arguably a common factor, seemingly documented throughout the West African region in this period,<sup>91</sup> though even here, conventional generalisations about the growth of 'plantations' or a 'slave mode of production' tend to obscure the variety of forms of social relations of production which slavery might involve, from a quasi-feudal system in which the individual slave was an essentially independent producer paying a sort of rent to his master (as was apparently the case in Old Calabar) to the classic form of plantation slavery involving large-scale organisation and the appropriation of the entire product by the owner (as in Dahomey).<sup>92</sup> This growth of domestic slavery tended to cushion the effects of the loss of the overseas markets for West African slave suppliers, although widespread evidence for falling slave prices shows that it did not fully compensate for it. It is difficult, however, to find other generalisations of such universal validity. The transition clearly did create various problems and threats to existing rulers, but its destabilising potential was not everywhere realised. Success or failure in coping with the problems of the transition depended not only on the political skills of individual rulers, but also on the differing natures of the societies they ruled: highly centralised states (such as Asante or Dahomey) were more likely to be able to contain the strains than those which were weaker or more divided (as in Senegambia). The contradiction between Ajayi's stress on continuity and Hopkins's insistence on discontinuity is not necessarily irresolvable, since both sides in the controversy can agree that the responses of West African societies to the commercial changes of the nineteenth century contained elements of both: the difference between 'adaptation' and 'revolution', while not merely verbal, is essentially one of emphasis, and to a large degree may be bridged through the progress of detailed research, which will show the balance between continuity and change in each particular case.

To evaluate the significance of the commercial transition it has also to be situated, as

Ajayi has repeatedly emphasised, within the general context of West African history during the nineteenth century. There were other forces affecting West Africa in this period, which may well be regarded as more important in their impact than the changing nature of overseas commerce.<sup>93</sup> The economic importance of the Atlantic trade, and hence of the changes in it which occurred during the nineteenth century, clearly differed for different West African societies. While overwhelmingly important for coastal trading states such as Bonny, it was less central to the communities in the hinterland, whose economies were based mainly on subsistence agriculture. Ajayi has pertinently observed, with reference to the Yoruba wars of the nineteenth century, that 'the role of trade generally and the slave trade in particular has been grossly exaggerated... The basic ingredients of power were land and taxable peasants'.<sup>94</sup> The point is well taken, even if arguably Ajayi himself has tended in turn to underestimate the importance of the commercial sector of the economy as a source of state revenues and resources.<sup>95</sup> The implications of economic change, moreover, interacted with other non-economic factors, such as Islam in the case of Senegambia or the political issues stressed by Ajayi in Yorubaland, in ways which are difficult to disentangle. For the purposes of historical research and exposition, the concept of the nineteenth-century 'crisis of adaptation' is a point of departure rather than a conclusion, a model (and therefore a simplification) of historical processes which serves as a way of approaching the particularity and complexity of events rather than as a substitute for them.

## Notes

- 1 J. F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: the making of a new elite*, Longman, London, 1965.
- 2 Ajayi, 'The Ijaye War, 1860-5', in J. F. Ade Ajayi and Robert S. Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, 1964, pp. 63-128; 'The Aftermath of the Fall of Old Oyo', in J. F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder (eds), *History of West Africa*, vol. 2, Longman, London, 1974, pp. 129-66.
- 3 Ajayi, 'West African States at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century', in J. F. Ade Ajayi and Ian Espie (eds), *A Thousand Years of West African History*, Nelson, London, 1965, pp. 248-61; J. F. Ade Ajayi and B. O. Oloruntimehin, 'West Africa in the anti-slave trade era', in *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 6, Cambridge University Press, 1976, pp. 200-21.
- 4 Ajayi, *Christian Missions*, p. 11.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.
- 6 Ajayi, 'West African States', p. 253.
- 7 Ajayi and Oloruntimehin, 'West Africa in the anti-slave trade era', p. 214.
- 8 Ralph A. Austen, 'The Abolition of the Overseas Slave Trade: a distorted theme in West African history', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 5, 2 (1970) pp. 257-74.
- 9 K. Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1956.
- 10 A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, Longman, London, 1973.
- 11 Patrick Manning, 'Slave Trade, "Legitimate" Trade, and Imperialism Revisited: The Control of Wealth in the Bights of Benin and Biafra', in Paul E. Lovejoy (ed.), *Africans in Bondage: studies in slavery and the slave trade. Essays in honour of Phillip D. Curtin*, African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1986, pp. 203-33.
- 12 Parliamentary Papers (hereafter, PP), 1842 (551), vol. 11, Report from the Select Committee on the West Coast of Africa, Minutes of Evidence, §467, 511; 1847-8 (272), vol. 22, First Report of the Select Committee on the Slave Trade, Minutes of Evidence, §2620, 2627, 2631.

- 13 PP, 1857-8 (2443-I), vol. 61, Correspondence [Class B] relating to the Slave Trade 1857-8, no. 3: Consul Campbell to Earl of Clarendon, 14 March 1857. For Bilali's revolt, cf. C. Magbaily Fyle, 'The Idea of Slavery in Nineteenth Century Sierra Leone: the career of Bilali', *Journal of the Historical Society of Sierra Leone*, 2, 1 (1978), pp. 57-61, who does not however discuss the suggested connection with the groundnut trade.
- 14 PP, 1854-5 (0-4), vol. 56, Correspondence [Class B] relating to the Slave Trade 1854-5, no. 7: Consul Campbell to Earl of Clarendon, 1 June 1854; 1859 (2569-I), vol. 34, Sess. II, Correspondence [Class B] relating to the Slave Trade 1858-9, no. 11: Consul Campbell to Earl of Clarendon, 28 March 1858.
- 15 PP, 1857 (2282), vol. 44, Sess. II, Correspondence [Class B] relating to the Slave Trade 1856-7, no. 22: Consul Campbell to Earl of Clarendon, 14 June 1856.
- 16 PP, 1860 (2749-I), vol. 70, Correspondence [Class B] relating to the Slave Trade 1859-60, nos. 3 and 6: Consul Campbell to Earl of Malmesbury, 5 March and 5 April 1859.
- 17 Thomas J. Hutchinson, *Impressions of Western Africa*, 1858; reprinted by Frank Cass, London, 1970, p. 261.
- 18 Consul Hutchinson to Court of Equity of Bonny, 24 April 1856, in Thomas J. Hutchinson, *Ten Years' Wandering among the Ethiopians*, 1861, reprinted by Frank Cass, London, 1967, p. 181.
- 19 Hutchinson, *Impressions of Western Africa*, pp. 141-42.
- 20 Hutchinson *Ten Years' Wandering among the Ethiopians*, pp. 3-6. This 1858 slave rebellion in Duala is briefly discussed by Ralph A. Austen, 'Slavery among the Coastal Middlemen: the Duala of Cameroon', in Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopyoff (eds), *Slavery in Africa*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1977, pp. 305-33, but without exploring the commercial issues reportedly involved.
- 21 PP, 1865 (412), vol. 5, Report from the Select Committee on the State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Minutes of Evidence, §2165, 2167.
- 22 Ajayi, 'The Ijaye War', p. 123.
- 23 Although Dike describes Alali as head of the Anna Pepple House throughout the period 1833-63, other sources indicate that the headship (and the Regency) in the 1830s were held by an elder son of Madu called Iloli, and that Alali assumed the headship only after this man's death.
- 24 Dike, *Trade and Politics*, pp. 69, 153.
- 25 G. I. Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers*, International African Institute, London, 1963, pp. 150-55.
- 26 Jones, 'The Political Organisation of Old Calabar', in Daryll Forde (ed.), *Efik Traders of Old Calabar*, International African Institute, London, 1956, pp. 116-69; Kannan K. Nair, *Politics and Society in Southeastern Nigeria 1841-1906; a study of power, diplomacy and commerce in Old Calabar*, Frank Cass, London, 1972; A. J. H. Latham, *Old Calabar 1600-1891*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1973.
- 27 Latham, *Old Calabar*, pp. 100-2.
- 28 For George Duke, see *ibid.*, p. 99, for Eyo Okun, cf. Nair, *Politics and Society*, p. 43.
- 29 Dike, *Trade and Politics*, pp. 154-59.
- 30 P. C. Lloyd, 'The Isekiri in the Nineteenth Century: an outline social history', *Journal of African History*, 4, 2 (1963), pp. 207-31; Obaro Ikime, *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta: the rise and fall of Nana Olomu*, Heinemann, London, 1968.
- 31 PP, 1859 (2569-I), vol. 34, Sess. II, Correspondence [Class B] relating to the Slave Trade 1858-9, no. 2: Consul Campbell to Earl of Clarendon, 1 March 1858.
- 32 Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Isekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Longman, London, 1969, pp. 39-40; but cf. the contrary view expressed in another work (apparently written later, although published earlier) by the same author (below, n. 59).

- 33 J. B. Webster and A. A. Boahen, *The Revolutionary Years: West Africa since 1800*, Longman, London, 1967, pp. 193-207.
- 34 MacGregor Laird and R. A. K. Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa by the River Niger*, 2 vols, 1837; reprinted by Frank Cass, London, 1968, vol. 1, p. 106.
- 35 Cf. Lloyd, 'The Isekiri', pp. 218-19; Nair, *Politics and Society*, p. 37.
- 36 Webster and Boahen, *The Revolutionary Years*, p. 202; Nair, *Politics and Society*, pp. 29-30.
- 37 Nair, *Politics and Society*, p. 39.
- 38 Webster and Boahen, *The Revolutionary Years*, pp. 107-22.
- 39 See especially Karl Polanyi, *Dahomey and the Slave Trade*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1966.
- 40 Jones, *Trading States*, p. 73. The claim that the Aro had been unable to control the oil trade had, in fact, been made earlier by Dike, but without supporting argument or evidence: *Trade and Politics*, p. 45.
- 41 U. I. Ukwu, 'The Development of Trade and Marketing in Igboland', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 3, 4 (1967), pp. 647-62.
- 42 Cf. A. E. Afigbo, 'The Eclipse of the Aro Slaving Oligarchy 1807-1927', in *Ropes of Sand (Studies in Igbo History and Culture)*, University Press, Ibadan, 1981, pp. 239-82.
- 43 A. G. Hopkins, 'Economic Imperialism in West Africa: Lagos, 1880-92', *Economic History Review*, 21, 3 (1968), pp. 580-600.
- 44 This is clear from a later article by Hopkins, in which the citation of Campbell is explicit: 'Property Rights and Empire Building: Britain's annexation of Lagos, 1861', *Journal of Economic History*, 40, 4 (1980), pp. 777-98.
- 45 J. F. Ade Ajayi and Ralph A. Austen, 'Hopkins on Economic Imperialism in West Africa', *Economic History Review*, 25, 3 (1972), pp. 303-06; see also Hopkins's reply, 'Economic Imperialism in West Africa: a rejoinder', *ibid.*, pp. 307-12.
- 46 Ajayi, 'The Ijaye War', pp. 63-65.
- 47 Martin A. Klein, *Islam and Imperialism in Senegal: Sine-Saloum, 1847-1914*, Edinburgh University Press, 1968, pp. 44-45.
- 48 Klein 'Slavery, the Slave Trade and Legitimate Commerce in Late Nineteenth-Century Africa', *Etudes d'Histoire Africaine*, 2 (1971), pp. 5-28.
- 49 Klein 'Social and Economic Factors in the Muslim Revolution in Senegambia', *Journal of African History*, 13, 2 (1972), pp. 419-41.
- 50 David Ross, 'The Autonomous Kingdom of Dahomey, 1818-1894' (PhD thesis, University of London, 1967).
- 51 Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, 'De la traite des esclaves à l'exportation de l'huile de palme et des palmistes au Dahomey: XIX siècle', in Claude Meillassoux (ed.), *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa*, International African Institute, London, 1971, pp. 107-23.
- 52 Ivor Wilks, 'Asante Policy towards the Hausa Trade in the Nineteenth Century', *ibid.*, pp. 124-41.
- 53 Kwame Arhin, 'Aspects of the Ashanti Northern Trade in the Nineteenth Century', *Africa*, 40, 4 (1970), pp. 363-73.
- 54 Hopkins, *Economic History of West Africa*, pp. 124-66.
- 55 Jones, *Trading States of the Oil Rivers*.
- 56 E. J. Alagoa, 'Nineteenth Century Revolutions in the Eastern Delta States and Calabar', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 5, 4 (1971), pp. 565-74.
- 57 Austen, 'Abolition of the Overseas Slave Trade', p. 265.
- 58 E. J. Alagoa and Adadonye Fombo, *A Chronicle of Grand Bonny*, Ibadan University Press, 1972, p. 46.
- 59 Ikime, *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta*, p. 8, n. 26.
- 60 Lloyd, 'The Isekiri', pp. 212-14. There was also an overall depression in trade in Isekiri
- 61 in the 1830s and 1840s, when the slave trade was in decline but the oil trade had not yet got going, which may have contributed to undermining the monarchy: it is only in this sense that the crisis in Isekiri can be said to have been 'caused by the transition from the slave trade to the palm-oil trade', as suggested by Elizabeth Isichei, *History of West Africa since 1800*, Macmillan, London, 1977, p. 118.
- 62 Latham, *Old Calabar*, pp. 92-95. On this, however, Latham is too sweeping, since contemporary evidence suggests that while the Duke Ward plantations did not produce oil, those established later in Creek Town did: cf. Hope Masterton Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa: a review of missionary work and adventure 1829-1859*, 1863; reprinted by Frank Cass, 1970, pp. 320, 426, 472.
- 63 Latham, *Old Calabar*, p. 32. Against Latham, cf. Rosemary Harris, 'Efik History Reconsidered', *Africa*, 46, 3 (1976) pp. 285-89. The question turns on contested claims that Willy Honesy (d. 1820), a leading chief of Creek Town in the late eighteenth century, was of foreign, and thus by implication unfree, birth.
- 64 Isichei, *History of West Africa*, pp. 116-24.
- 65 Hopkins, *Economic History*, p. 147.
- 66 Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition*, vol. 1, p. 103.
- 67 Cf. Dike, *Trade and Politics*, p. 103; Lloyd, 'The Isekiri', p. 218. This move towards monopoly is discussed by Manning, 'Slave Trade, Legitimate Trade and Imperialism Revisited', pp. 223-24, who suggests that it can be related to more difficult trading conditions from the 1860s onwards, when oil prices tended to fall. Such conditions certainly favoured large-scale enterprises on the European side of the trade (by eliminating less efficient businesses, and creating pressures to increase turnover in order to compensate for lower profit rates) and also prompted attempts at monopoly in order to improve bargaining power (e.g. by George Goldie on the Niger); similar considerations presumably applied to the African side of the trade also.
- 68 Hopkins, *Economic History*, pp. 145-46.
- 69 Latham, *Old Calabar*, pp. 81, 112.
- 70 S. J. S. Cookey, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: his life and times, 1821-1891*, NOK Publishers, New York, 1974, p. 48.
- 71 Cited in Isichei, *History of West Africa*, p. 152.
- 72 Latham, *Old Calabar*, pp. 81-82.
- 73 Those employed in canoes are fed, and are in crews of six to ten in each canoe under a captain or super-cargo. He has a commission on his trade, and may trade on his own account a little, but not in palm oil, or so as to neglect his master's interests. The canoe people traffic in provisions, buying with English goods up the country, and selling to the towns-people, ships, and mission house'. Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years*, pp. 319-20, quoted in Latham, *Old Calabar*, p. 85 (emphasis added).
- 74 Susan M. Hargreaves, 'The Political Economy of Nineteenth Century Bonny: a study of power, authority, legitimacy and ideology in a Delta trading community from 1790-1914' (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1987).
- 75 Austen, 'Abolition of the Overseas Slave Trade', pp. 270-1.
- 76 Sara S. Berry, *Cocoa, Custom and Socio-Economic Change in Rural Western Nigeria*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975 pp. 25-28. A later detailed case study claimed to vindicate Berry against Hopkins on this point, albeit with reference only to a single Yoruba community (Okeigbo) and without any analysis of contemporary documentation: Julian Clarke, 'Households and the Political Economy of Small-scale Cash Crop Production in South-western Nigeria', *Africa*, 51, 4 (1981), pp. 807-23.
- 77 Isichei, *History of West Africa*, pp. 151-52.
- 78 Edward Reynolds, *Trade and Economic Change on the Gold Coast, 1807-1874*, Longman, Harlow, 1974. Reynolds's account of the development of 'mass participation' (*ibid.*,

- pp. 80-85), which is here said to have preceded the rise of the palm oil trade, follows closely by the contemporary account of Brodie Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa*, 2 vols, 1853; reprinted by Frank Cass, London, 1966, vol. 2, pp. 30-46.
- 79 Cf. Mary McCarthy, *Social Change and the Growth of British Political Power in the Gold Coast: the Fante states 1807-1874*, University Press of America, Lanham, 1983.
- 80 Adam Jones, *From Slaves to Palm Kernels: a history of the Galinbas Country (West Africa) 1730-1890*, Franz Steiner, Wiesbaden, 1983, pp. 107-08.
- 81 David Northrup, *Trade without Rulers: pre-colonial economic development in South-eastern Nigeria*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978, pp. 206-07.
- 82 J. N. Orijij, 'A Re-assessment of the Organisation and Benefits of the Slave and Palm Produce Trade amongst the Ngwa-Igbo', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 16, 3 (1982), pp. 523-48. Orijij's analysis of the Ngwa case is, however, in turn disputed by Susan M. Martin, *Palm Oil and Protest: an economic history of the Ngwa Region, South-eastern Nigeria, 1800-1980*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 31-55.
- 83 Hopkins did in fact, anticipate this line of analysis in his comments on the specific case of Asante, but he did not seek to generalise the point: *Economic History*, p. 144, following Arhin, 'Aspects of the Ashanti Northern Trade'.
- 84 Claude Meillassoux, 'Introduction', in his *Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets*, pp. 56-57.
- 85 Reynolds, *Trade and Economic Change*, pp. 103-38.
- 86 Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, 1975; Thomas J. Lewin, *Asante before the British: the Prempeh years, 1875-1990*, The Regents Press of Kansas, Lawrence, 1978.
- 87 Robin Law, 'Royal Monopoly and Private Enterprise in the Atlantic Trade: the case of Dahomey', *Journal of African History*, 18, 4 (1977), pp. 555-77; cf also John C. Yoder, 'Fly and Elephant Parties: political polarization in Dahomey, 1840-70', *Journal of African History*, 15, 3 (1974) pp. 417-32.
- 88 Robin Law, 'Human Sacrifice in Pre-Colonial West Africa', *African Affairs*, 84, 334 (1985), pp. 53-87.
- 89 John Reid, 'Warrior Aristocrats in Crisis: the political effects of the transition from the slave trade to palm oil commerce in the nineteenth century kingdom of Dahomey' (PhD thesis, University of Stirling, 1986); also Robin Law, 'Slave-Raiders and Middlemen, Monopolists and Free-Traders: the supply of slaves for the Atlantic trade in Dahomey', *Journal of African History*, 30, 1 (1989), pp. 45-68.
- 90 Manning, 'Slave Trade, Legitimate Trade and Imperialism', p. 221.
- 91 Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: a history of slavery in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 159-83.
- 92 For this contrast, compare a report from Old Calabar in 1851 of the execution of a Creek Town farm-slave because 'he had paid his master the quantity of oil required of him, but had sold the surplus, admitted to be his own, to another than his master, and so had violated a law of the plantation', and a report from Dahomey in the 1860s which speaks of slaves *treating* oil, implying that it belonged to their owner: Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years*, p. 472 (emphasis added); Abbé J. Laffitte, *Le Dahomé: souvenirs de voyage et de mission*, Alfred Mame, Tours, 1874, p. 170. Under the former system the slave shared in the profits of the oil trade, whereas under the latter these went exclusively (unless illicitly intercepted) to the master: the optimistic view of the implications of 'legitimate' commerce for the position of slaves put forward by Consul Campbell evidently assumed a version of the former system as the norm.
- 93 Cf. Tunji Oloruntimehin, 'The Impact of the Abolition Movement on the Social and Political Development of West Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *African Notes*, 7, 1 (1972), pp. 33-58.