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CHAPTER 6

WEST AFRICA IN THE ANTI-SLAVE TRADE ERA

European relationships with West Africa in the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century were to a large extent dominated by the European effort to end the trans-Atlantic slave trade and to replace it by trade in the agricultural produce of West Africa. This led in part to the foundation of Sierra Leone and Liberia, the strengthening of British and French trading depots in other parts of the coast, a new European curiosity about the interior of Africa, and a renewed interest in effecting social and cultural change in Africa through Christian missions. This range of activities became an integrated programme of the abolitionists – stopping the slave trade, maintaining an anti-slavery naval squadron to enforce the prohibition, expanding ‘legitimate trade’, supporting missionary activities and exploration of the interior. These activities encouraged the involvement of Europeans in Africa, and several European and American nations came to participate in them to a greater or lesser extent. Abolition of the slave trade became the most common ideology to justify to the European public the expense and the fact of this involvement. This ideology was particularly strong in Britain, and from Britain it affected other countries. For example, owing to the tradition of Anglo-French rivalry in West Africa, the British example ensured the wholesale adoption of the abolitionist programme in France. Consequently, in the written European sources on Africa in this period, whether from missionaries, explorers, ‘legitimate’ traders, naval officers or government officials, the theme of abolition looms large, often disproportionately large, and the period 1807 to about 1870 in West African history has often been called the anti-slave trade or abolitionist era. The aim of this chapter is to assess the significance of European activities in West Africa in this period and thus to examine the validity of this title.

The essentially Eurocentric description of West African history in the pre-colonial nineteenth century implied by this title involves distortion in a number of ways. It seems to project onto the West African peoples the European preoccupation with the slave trade and its abolition. The protagonists of this view suggest or imply that the slave trade dominated the West African economy; that raiding for slaves was the basic cause and purpose of West African wars; that such slave wars or

the economic effects of the slave trade were the main factors in the rise and fall of West African states.¹ Accordingly, the issues for or against abolition are treated as the dominant themes of West African history in the nineteenth century, and the impact on West African states and peoples by Europeans preoccupied with the slave trade and its abolition is exaggerated. It is often overlooked that for all the effort of the abolitionists, European influence by 1870 remained limited virtually to the coast. For most West African peoples and states, the Christian abolitionist factor, if it existed at all, was very marginal in this period.

This tendency to exaggerate the role of Europeans as a factor of change in West African history before 1870 has led to another kind of distortion. Not only are the main events of West African history explained largely in terms of the single factor of the slave trade or its abolition; often the colonial period is allowed anachronistically to cast its shadow backwards to an undue extent. Because the abolitionist movement in many respects prepared the way for the colonial period, some historians go further and treat West African history between 1800 and 1870 only as a prelude to, if not an integral part of, the colonial period. They write with an underlying assumption that European rule was inevitable or imminent throughout the abolitionist era. They regard European officials who pursued policies advancing the areas of European control generally as the bold and far-sighted ones, and those who did not as hesitant, obstructionist and retrogressive.² They obscure or ignore the difference between the spread of European influence in the so-called informal empire and the formal exercise of sovereignty in the establishment of colonial rule, and they attribute to European officials in the former areas initiatives which they did not possess before the 1880s.³ Consequently, they see European activities before 1870 as

¹ For a recent statement of this view, see A. G. Hopkins, 'Economic imperialism in West Africa: Lagos 1882-92', *Economic History Review*, 1968, 21. For a critique, see J. F. A. Ajayi and R. S. Smith, *Yoruba warfare in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 1964), 123-5.

² See, for example, the relative treatment of General Louis C. Faidherbe and John Pope-Hennessy, e.g. on pp. 100 and 168 of J. D. Hargreaves, *Prelude to the partition of West Africa* (London, 1963). In popular textbooks, only the expansionist governors like Bouët-Williamcz, Faidherbe, MacCarthy, MacLean and Glover are mentioned by name. J. D. Fage, *A history of West Africa: an introductory survey* (Cambridge, 1969), while careful about the limits of British power, tends on pp. 162-3 to exaggerate the extent of French expansion.

³ Even a careful historian like J. D. Hargreaves, discussing the development of groundnuts in Senegal in the 1850s, says: 'Thus began the exploitation of Senegal's major cash crop, which did not require government colonization schemes or the alienation of African land to settlers. But the cultivation and marketing of groundnuts on any really extensive scale would require stable political conditions in the Senegal region and France still possessed neither the power nor the political skill to provide them.' (*West Africa: the former French states* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1967), 82.)

having caused revolutionary changes in West African social and economic systems, as well as decadence in the political systems, and other consequences of European dominance, which did not come about until the colonial period, and even then not precipitately in most places.

THE ISLAMIC ADVANCE

It should be emphasized, therefore, that for the vast majority of West Africans in the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century, Islam, not the Christian abolitionist movement, was the revolutionary factor creating larger political systems with new economic opportunities, and establishing new religious obligations and social values. By 1800, Islam was of course already a dominant religion in the Sudan, where for centuries it had competed with traditional African religions, not only as a set of personal beliefs but also as communal law, a source of social and cultural values and a complete way of life. Several Muslim rulers of Mali and Songhay had turned to Islam in their efforts to build supra-ethnic states and empires in the western Sudan. They used Muslim scribes and judges and legal precepts, much to the chagrin of traditionalists, especially in the rural areas. With the decline of Songhay, even though Islam continued to spread as a personal religion, there was a resurgence of traditional political systems and ethos and more accommodation of pre-Islamic religious ideas, as the Denianke Fulani and Mande came to power in Senegambia, the Rari took over in Masina, and the Bambara of Segou and Kaarta came to dominate a good deal of the western Sudan.¹ This in turn provoked a whole series of Islamic reform movements in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century aimed at establishing Muslim political control and the Islamic way of life throughout the western Sudan.²

This new advance in Islam began when Fulani religious leaders established theocracies in Futa Jalon and Futa Toro in the Senegambia region. From there it spread to northern Nigeria, where between 1804 and 1810 Usman dan Fodio led a movement that conquered the old Hausa states and established over them a series of theocratic emirates owing allegiance to a single caliph whose capital was located at Sokoto. The older 'Habe'³ rulers had represented Hausa ethnic rule and an

¹ See B. O. Qlqrunṭinṭṭin, *The Segou Tukulor empire* (London, 1972), 8, 21–2, 34, 36 and 317.

² These movements are examined in detail in chapter 4 of this volume.

³ 'Habe', a Fulani word meaning 'strangers', is here and elsewhere used to designate the Hausa rulers of the pre-jihad period.

accommodation between Islam and traditional Hausa culture. The confrontation between them and the new theocratic emirates was the dominant historical factor throughout Hausaland for most of the nineteenth century. Pockets of Habe resistance remained unconquered. The new Fulani rulers spoke Hausa. They adopted and adapted Hausa political, social and military institutions, but Islam became established as the dominant way of life, regulating public and private law and personal morality. For the first time, the Hausa states were brought together within a single religious and political system. What is more, this movement thrust itself beyond Hausaland into Nupe, Ilorin, Gwari, Bauchi, Gombe, and Adamawa, establishing Fulani dominance and the frontiers of Islam as an aggressive force among peoples hitherto little touched by Islamic influences. The efforts of the Fulani to supplant the Kanuri in control of the Bornu empire provided an opportunity for the reforms of Muḥammad al-Amin al-Kānamī, with the consequent collapse of the ancient Saifawa dynasty and the rise of a new Kanembu dynasty and Shuwa Arab bureaucracy. Like its bitter enemies in the Sokoto caliphate, the Kanembu dynasty combined religious and political leadership in the hands of the ruler, and placed the basis of the political order no longer in traditional custom but in Islamic law.¹

Following this example, the Cisse of Masina led a revolution in 1818 to topple the Rari dynasty and the Arma, the descendants of the Moroccan conquerors of Songhay. They established a theocratic state where a council of Muslim scholars, led by the caliph with his capital at Hamdallahi, regulated public law and private morality according to Islamic tenets. One result of this successful revolution was that the new rulers sought to establish the independence of Masina and to end its subordination to the Bambara of Segu, whose regime remained based in traditional religion. This provoked war between the caliphate and the Bambara until the 1860s, when the Tukolor became a threat to both and encouraged them belatedly to make common cause.²

The Tukolor revolution which was launched around 1848 was perhaps the most militant attempt to use Islam as an instrument of large scale state-formation in the Western Sudan. Led by al-Hājj 'Umar b. Sa'id 'Tal, the *khalifa* of the Tijāniyya in West Africa, Tukolor aristocratic and military castes sought to establish a new theocratic regime

¹ M. Last, *The Sokoto caliphate* (London, 1967); I. Brenner, *The Shehus of Kuka* (London, 1973); R. A. Adeleye, *Power and diplomacy in northern Nigeria* (London, 1971).

² A. Hampaté Ba and J. Daget, *L'empire peul du Masina* (Paris, 1962); W. A. Brown, 'Towards a chronology for the caliphate of Hamdullahi (Masina)', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 1968, 8, 3, 428-34.

over Segu, Kaarta, and some parts of Senegambia. The result was a confrontation between Tukolor social and political institutions as expressed in the ethos of Tijāni ways of Islam on the one side and Bambara institutions and culture on the other. The attempt to expand down the Senegal threatened to shut off the French from the waterway vital for the gum trade with the Moors of southern Mauritania, and the French resisted this. The expansion into Masina provoked not merely theological disputations with the caliphate at Hamdallahi, but also a series of wars in one of which al-Ḥājj 'Umar himself lost his life. Thereafter, the dominant theme of the history of the area, until the French conquest began in the 1880s, was the effort of Ahmadu, al-Ḥājj 'Umar's son and successor, to maintain Tijāni rule over the vast empire with the help and sometimes in the face of the rivalry of competing relatives and powerful Tukolor *talibes* (lieutenants).¹

From the 1860s onwards, Islamic influence moved southwards to the edge of the forest zone. First, there was the attempt of Samory Toure to reconstruct various Mande peoples and states into a vast political system. He was himself not learned, but as an enlightened long-distance trader brought up in the tradition of the Dyula, he chose to use Islamic education, legal precepts and ideology in his endeavours at state formation.² This further encouraged colonies of Dyula traders, settled all along trade routes connecting the trading centres of the Sudan to the capitals of the forest and coastal states, to convert their mercantile and religious dominance into political hegemonies in places like Sikasso, Bobo Dioulasso and Bonduku.³ Farther west in Senegambia in the same period, Islamic religious leaders or marabouts were establishing Koranic schools, and acting as political and commercial advisers among the Wolof, Temne, Lebou, and others. They made charms for the aristocratic castes and, tried to win influence over them. In these and other ways, they expanded religious and commercial opportunities for Muslims and, as the opportunity arose, they built up Islamic communities that exercised a good deal of political influence if not power. While no major Islamic states emerged, the political, social and religious consequences of the spread of Islam from the 1860s to the 1880s were far more significant than those of the advancing frontiers of European influence.⁴

¹ Oloruntimehin, *The Segu Tukolor empire*.

² J. Suret-Canale, 'La Guinée dans le système colonial', *Présence africaine*, 1960, 29, 9-44.

³ R. R. Griffith, 'Dyula recruitment techniques in the West Volta region' (African History Colloquium on West African State Formation, UCLA, 1970).

⁴ M. A. Klein, 'The Moslem revolution in nineteenth century Senegambia', in D. F. McCall, N. R. Bennett and J. Butler, eds., *Western African history* (London, 1969).

THE ISLAMIC ADVANCE

Farther east, in the forest states, this Islamic resurgence had important repercussions though it did not become the major factor of change. In the Volta region, the use of Muslim scribes and mounted mercenaries encouraged a new efficiency in state administration as far south as Asante, but the Islamic factor remained marginal in the expansion of the Asante empire and its conflict with the coastal peoples.¹ The establishment of Fulani rule in Ilorin was a result, not a cause, of the collapse of the Old Oyo kingdom. Fulani expansion and the mass movement of people helped the rapid spread of Islam in major Yoruba towns in the nineteenth century. However, it was the traditional Yoruba institutions, political systems and religious ideas that dominated and shaped the reconstruction and reorganization that followed the foundation of new political centres.² Similarly, while Ilorin and Nupe expansion into the northern parts of the Benin empire helped to spread Islam and to reduce the influence of the Benin monarch, the monarchy itself and the traditional religious and political systems survived.

EUROPEAN COASTAL ENCLAVES

European trading posts existed all along the coast, and it was here that the European impact was most evident. At some of these trading posts, forts had been built to protect the trade from European rivals and hostile African neighbours. At others, barracoons were erected to store slaves pending the trans-Atlantic journey. Some of the best known forts and barracoons were built in St Louis, Gorée, Rufisque, and St Mary's Island in Senegambia; Bissau in former Portuguese Guinea; Elmina, Anomabu, Cape Coast and Christiansborg (Accra) in modern Ghana; and Whydah in Dahomey. Around these trading posts, a mixed population had grown up, even by 1800, owing more allegiance to the European traders than to the neighbouring African states. Apart from the handful of European traders at each station, there were mulattoes – usually products of the union of European fathers and West African women, educated around the forts, on trading vessels or in Europe – holding administrative, commercial and military positions at the forts and helping to extend European commercial interests among neighbouring African peoples, or along the waterways and other trading

¹ N. Levtzion, *Muslims and chiefs in West Africa* (Oxford, 1968); I. Wilks, 'Ashanti government', in C. D. Ford and P. M. Kaberry, eds., *West African kingdoms in the nineteenth century* (London, 1967).

² J. F. A. Ajayi, 'The aftermath of the fall of Old Oyo', in J. F. A. Ajayi and M. Crowder, eds., *A history of West Africa*, II (London, 1974).

routes into the interior. A few African neighbours came to attach themselves to these stations as traders, labourers or deck hands on the trading vessels. The largest group, however, were slaves and emancipated slaves who did the menial work, head-loading goods, looking after the slaves in the barracoons, and providing labour at the ports. The resulting communities of strangers were developing into municipalities under European control and with varying degrees of independence *vis-à-vis* the neighbouring African states, depending on the size of the community itself or the power and cohesiveness of the neighbouring state. The size of St Louis (12,000 by 1837), its recognition with Gorée, and later Rufisque and Dakar, as municipalities by revolutionary governments in France, with defined governmental institutions, helped to consolidate their position as independent communes.¹ On the Gold Coast, the neighbouring Africans recognized European control in the forts but not beyond them. Some states claimed to be overlords with the right to collect tax for the land on which the forts were built. Other states depended to some extent on the forts for protection against hostile neighbours, and the governors of the forts therefore wielded influence beyond the forts.

These European-controlled municipalities and enclaves provided the bases for European activities in the anti-slave trade era. New enclaves were established, notably the settlements of Europeans and freed slaves in Freetown and surrounding villages of Sierra Leone, and of Afro-Americans and freed slaves in various colonies on the Liberian Coast, as well as French trading posts at Grand Bassam, Assinie and Libreville (Gabon).² The population, power and influence of these centres grew in the course of the nineteenth century and they became important markets on the coast and gateways to the interior. They expanded their influence either through agreements with neighbouring Africans, as on the Gold Coast, or through naval and military force, as on the lower Senegal, in Cayor and Lagos. But it is important not to antedate or exaggerate this influence. European power was based on a superiority of naval power, which was effective on the sea coast even though African canoes had the advantage in the lagoons and creeks. Military power on land, as Governor MacCarthy discovered on the Gold Coast in 1824, was more uncertain, because there was no such predominance in the armament available to either side. While Europeans had the advantage of discipline and superior techniques, Africans had the advantage of

¹ Hargreaves, *West Africa*, 62–77; G. W. Johnson, *The emergence of black politics in Senegal* (Stanford, 1971), chapter 1.

² See chapter 3 of this volume.

numbers and better knowledge of the forested terrain. Even where Europeans could use African allies and auxiliaries, they found military expeditions which would be adequate to ensure victory very expensive and they resorted to them rather sparingly. Thus until 1880, African political and religious systems, though increasingly under pressure, remained dominant even on the coast.

ATTACK ON THE SLAVE TRADE

As mentioned earlier, the attack on the slave trade was the initial justification for the expansion of European and American interests in West Africa. Opposition to the trade developed gradually in Europe towards the end of the eighteenth century, when a significant and growing number of people began to point at the cruelty and inhumanity of the traffic in human beings as well as at the wastefulness of cheap enforced labour. The campaign against the trade gained support partly from the liberalism associated with the age of the French Revolution, with its attack on privilege and oppression, partly also from the new economic ideas of the era of industrialization, in which a labour-intensive economy was being undermined by the introduction of mechanical devices. It was by no means easy to persuade those with vested interests in the trade to give it up, but a number of factors combined to persuade the British government to outlaw the trade in 1807. These factors include the depression in the British maritime trade following the American War of Independence, the decline of several of the West Indian islands which had passed their optimum stage of exploitation, the growing fear in the West Indies of the large number of rebellious slaves, the rise of an East Indian lobby and, above all, the religious revival associated with John Wesley, who made abolition a cardinal principle of the Evangelical faith and a popular cause. Denmark, whose participation in the trade was not substantial, had given up the trade in 1802. Sweden and the Netherlands followed in 1813 and 1814 respectively. A combination of those opposed to the trade and those who wished to enhance the value of their slaves got a bill through the United States senate to prohibit the trade from 1808, but few people expected the law to be seriously enforced, especially when the expansion of cotton production in the southern states called for additional labour. However, once the British, who had handled the largest share of the trade in the eighteenth century, decided to give it up, it was in their economic interest to persuade others to give it up as well.

The British thus took the lead from 1807 onwards in discouraging the export of slaves from West Africa to the New World. They had to persuade other European traders not merely to co-operate in outlawing the trade but also to permit or to assist the British navy in enforcing the ban on the transport of slaves by sea. In France, where the abolitionist movement had gone out of favour with the rise of Napoleon, it required diplomatic pressure to persuade the restored monarchy to prohibit the trade in stages between 1818 and 1823. Similar pressure brought Spain into line, and Portugal agreed to abolition north of the Equator, though these agreements had little effect in Brazil and Cuba, where labour-intensive cultivation of coffee and sugar respectively was being rapidly expanded. The British navy operated from Freetown and Fernando Po. When the French navy joined in after 1820 they operated from Gorée. Courts of mixed commission were set up in West Africa, the Caribbean and South America to try captured ships suspected of dealing in slaves. The United States government resisted the naval initiative from Britain, and instead offered half-hearted action by the United States navy operating from the Liberian and United States coasts.

Up to 1840, this campaign on the seas made little impact on the West African coast.¹ The naval patrols stimulated interest in the European enclaves on the coast, and the slaves set free by the courts were swelling their population. But the export of slaves hardly diminished.² American, Brazilian and other traders based in the New World replaced Europeans as the main exporters. The anti-slavery laws, international treaties, and the rules under which the naval patrols operated were tightened up, so that a ship could be judged a slaver from its equipment and not from the actual presence of slaves who, if a ship was about to be apprehended, could be thrown overboard, with costs recoverable from insurance companies. Even then, no significant decline was noticeable till the 1840s, when both Britain and France changed tactics from action on the high seas to attempt closer economic blockade and inshore activities in West African ports. It was only at this stage that the abolitionist movement began to impinge on the lives of the coastal peoples. Such close blockade required the co-operation of the coastal rulers, the negotiation of a whole series of slave trade treaties, and the constant threat of naval attacks.

The attitude of the coastal rulers was dictated by three basic considerations. The first was political. Many of the rulers, whether they were

¹ C. Lloyd, *The navy and the slave trade* (London, 1949), 89, 115.

² P. D. Curtin, *The Atlantic slave trade: a census* (Madison, 1969), Tables 67, 68.

economically dependent on the slave trade or not, resented foreign powers coming to dictate to them what or what not to trade in. They viewed such dictation as an attack on their sovereignty. This was why the abolitionists often resorted to treaties including promises of some compensation to the chiefs and the encouragement of alternative trade. But the Europeans insisted on the right to enforce the prohibition unilaterally. It was soon clear that both the British and the French were using the slave trade treaties to improve their economic influence in West Africa *vis-à-vis* other traders such as the Brazilians and Portuguese, and to make inroads into the right of independent action by the coastal states. Many of the smaller states, especially those whose capitals were close enough to the coast to be bombarded, yielded to the pressure. Some, like Lagos and Bonny, had their unco-operative rulers deposed and were thus forced into agreement. Others like Dahomey, while willing to trade in palm oil with the British and the French, refused to compromise their sovereignty and were distant enough from the coast to ignore the naval threat.

The second consideration was economic. Many of the coastal towns were formerly fishing villages which had become organized for the slave trade. The trade had become central to their life. They could not retain their population or level of prosperity if they gave it up, unless they found an equally prosperous alternative 'legitimate' trade. In some areas there was gold, gum, indigo, ivory or other produce which had formed part of the trade of the eighteenth century, but the most important new trade was in palm oil. Where, as in the Niger delta, the palm oil trade developed quickly, there was a smooth transition, and economic fears were not as important a consideration as political fears. In other places, such as Badagry, where the palm oil trade was either non-existent or slow to develop, the economic factor was predominant. Other crops such as coffee, cotton or groundnuts were slower to become established. It was not until the 1860s that the groundnut trade can be said to have effectively replaced the slave trade in the Sine-Saloum and Casamance regions of Senegambia. Cotton had to wait till the colonial period.

A third consideration, concerning the nature of slavery generally in West African society,¹ went beyond the question of finding substitute staples for the European trade. The coastal rulers who sold slaves thought in terms of domestic slavery in Africa, where there was deprivation of liberty and of the comfort and support of one's own relatives,

¹ J. F. A. Ajayi, *Christian missions in Nigeria 1841-91* (London, 1965), 53-6.

but not of the basic rights and attributes of human beings as in slavery in the New World. Much of the argument about the cruelty and inhumanity of the slave trade was therefore lost on them. Domestic slavery seemed to them an essential aspect of social and economic relationships. While free men could share their labour through mutual aid or age grade organizations, or through customary service to elders, in-laws and rulers, slavery was the most usual method of recruiting labour to work on the farms of the wealthy or in iron or gold mines. In long distance trade, slaves were used not merely to transport goods, but sometimes also in business transactions as a form of large-scale, self-exporting currency. Slavery provided a means of recruiting needed skilled labour, such as blacksmiths, veterinarians to look after horses and cattle, weavers, etc., from one community to another. Similarly, skilled slaves were used in war, or in administrative positions in which loyalty to the ruler was more important than the local political influence of the official. Some of these officials like the *kachella* of Bornu or the *wombai* of Kano were important notables. Some individual lieutenants of the jihadists, who were of slave origin, such as Mustapha who became emir of Niore in the Tukolor empire, rose to very high office.

It is not surprising therefore that while some West African rulers did not hesitate to support the end of the external slave trade, most were reluctant to give up the trade, and none considered giving up domestic slavery or the internal trade that nourished it. As long as European, particularly British, capital investments were financing cotton plantations in the southern United States, sugar in Cuba, and coffee in Brazil, and were giving insurance cover to slave ships and encouraging the South American governments to act independently of Spain and Portugal, the demand for slaves remained strong, and the coastal states found ways of evading naval patrols so as to supply the demand. After Brazil's final effective abolition of the trade in 1850, its volume was more than halved. Following the US emancipation proclamation of 1863, Cuba was left as the only significant importer. The naval effort against the trade could now be concentrated, and by 1866 the Atlantic slave trade was virtually extinguished.¹

LEGITIMATE TRADE AND DOMESTIC SLAVERY

One constant aim of the abolitionists, as we have seen, was that the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade should not mean a reduction in the volume and value of the European trade in West Africa. Until about

¹ D. P. Mannix and M. Cowley, *Black congress* (New York, 1962), 263–87; Curtin, *Atlantic slave trade*.

1850, there was little reduction in the trade between West Africa and America, though it came to be concentrated on Brazil, Cuba and the southern states. Gradually, trade with America declined as the United States itself drifted into isolation after the Civil War. By 1888, traffic between Lagos and Bahia had to be specially revived for the benefit of returning emancipated slaves. On the other hand, trade with Europe was expanding all the time, thus bringing to an end the old triangular pattern of trade linking Europe with West Africa and the New World.

In order to expand 'legitimate' trade so as to sustain and increase the trade with Europe, the abolitionists were initially anxious to develop agricultural plantations in West Africa. The various European enclaves along the coast were viewed not merely as trading posts, but also as centres from which the settlers and freed slaves could engage in large-scale cultivation of produce, the export of which would replace the doomed trade in slaves. Sierra Leone and Liberia were the most important centres of these agricultural experiments, but not the only ones. On the Gold Coast, in Nigeria, Bathurst, Fernando Po and other places, missionaries tried to establish coffee and cotton plantations. The French made elaborate plans for plantations on the Lower Senegal to be worked by indentured labour recruited from among former slaves around St Louis or from neighbouring African states, and to be protected by armed forts at Podor, Bakel and Medina. In 1818, Julien Schmaltz was sent there with troop reinforcements, agricultural experts and machinery. He and his successor, Baron Jacques François Roger, failed to get the plantations going. The traders of St Louis did not like the scheme since it was likely to endanger their gum trade. As the African neighbours were hostile, the labour was not forthcoming, and the notion of large-scale French colonization proved unrealistic.¹ A similar British attempt at establishing a model farm at the confluence of the Niger and the Benue in 1841–2 was dismally unsuccessful.²

The failure of these efforts at agricultural plantations was another reason why the abolitionist movement could not make the sort of impact on the West African scene that had been expected. Liberian coffee achieved some success, but was soon driven off the market by Brazilian coffee. Some cotton was exported from Senegal, but by 1840 it was clear that West Africa was not suitable for large-scale plantations or colonies of settlement under European leadership. The high mortality rate of European residents was a factor. There was also ignorance of tropical

¹ G. Hardy, *La mise en valeur du Sénégal de 1817 à 1854* (Paris, 1921).

² C. C. Ifemesia, 'The "civilising" mission of 1841', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1962, 2, 3, 291–310.

agriculture, except among a few Liberian settlers, who were not anxious to recreate in Africa the farm life from which they had escaped in America. One significant effect of these failures was to convince the rising Western-educated élite in West Africa that there was little money to be made from new methods in farming. They turned to the more prosperous import/export and distributive trade, and directed their educational endeavours towards literary and commercial goals to the neglect of technical and agricultural possibilities.¹ The expansion of 'legitimate' trade in West Africa therefore was to take place, not in the European enclaves, but within the existing African agricultural systems, and without unduly disturbing existing patterns either of production or of political authorities.

The increased demand for cash crops was met largely through the local initiative of coastal entrepreneurs in stimulating expansion of the production of palm produce, ivory, gum arabic, shea butter and indigo in the interior. Sometimes the vital necessity for certain European goods, in particular guns and gunpowder, encouraged the rulers and war chiefs in the interior to take a hand in organizing the production, transportation to the coast, and sale of these products.² More often, these activities were handled by local and long distance traders within the existing market system. The result was that the expansion of 'legitimate' trade did not lead to changes in the social structure which the abolitionists had expected in terms of undermining the basis of domestic slavery.

The 'commercial success of some of the freed slaves who returned from Sierra Leone or the New World, and of others who attached themselves to the missionaries, did represent the rise of a new class who owed their origin to the abolitionists. But outside the European enclaves, their influence lay in the future. True, there was an increased emphasis on entrepreneurial skills rather than descent in appointing heads of Houses, as the family units were called in the coastal towns of the Niger delta. But this was a process that had been going on during the slave trade era. Neither the isolated examples of people of slave origin, such as Jaja who achieved high office in the nineteenth century, nor the occasional slave riots in Calabar, where social mobility was restricted and oppression heightened by the competition of the élite as to the number of slaves they killed at funerals, implied that the abolitionists had achieved a social revolution in the delta city states or elsewhere

¹ J. F. A. Ajayi, 'The development of secondary grammar school education in Nigeria', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1963, 2, 4, 522.

² For the Ibadan example, see B. A. Awé, 'The Ajele system', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1964, 3, 1, 47-60.

outside the European enclaves.¹ The development of cash crops through 'legitimate' trade did not lead to a general emancipation of domestic slaves or the growth of a sturdy, free peasant class. On the contrary, the demand for more agricultural produce was met largely by increasing the domestic slave labour force.

The abolitionists were at pains to explain why the expansion of 'legitimate' trade failed to effect changes in West African social structure in this period. They argued that this was because palm fruits, ivory, shea butter, indigo and gum were not really produced, not specially cultivated; that they were collected, and in this they were not unlike slaves; and that the socio-economic system that had sustained the slave trade² could absorb the expanded collection of the new staples without any fundamental changes. The weakness of this argument is that the cultivation of groundnuts in Senegambia in this period produced no significant change. Although it has been suggested that the income from groundnuts was more widely distributed than the income from slaves – the same may be said of palm oil³ – any effect of this could only have been in the long run. There was little change as long as the pattern of production, transportation and marketing remained the same. Change was more rapid in the colonial period because, although cotton, cacao, and other cash crops were developed within the same system, the Europeans had first destroyed African sovereignty, taken the initiative, and were no longer confined to the coast. The cultivation of groundnuts, of itself, marked no departures from the system that had produced slaves, ivory, palm oil, or gum. The increased production of palm oil was no easy, effortless exercise. The collection of palm fruits, the manufacture of palm oil, transportation to the coast, and organization for export, raised the same problems of scale of production, land tenure, and marketing organization that groundnuts raised and other cultivated crops were to raise later. In the abolitionist era, these problems were tackled within the existing pattern of markets, with domestic

¹ R. Horton, 'From fishing village to city state: a social history of New Calabar', in M. Douglas and P. M. Kaberry, eds., *Man in Africa* (London, 1969); K. K. Nair, *Politics and society in old Calabar* (London, 1972).

² Polanyi and other economic anthropologists have described this as an example of the 'archaic economy' in which there is an absence of a money economy, and a predominance of the middleman role of state monopolies or coastal entrepreneurs linked with overseas interests and exclusive practices such as the restrictive trust system (K. Polanyi, 'The economy as instituted process', in K. Polanyi, C. M. Arensberg and H. W. Pearson, eds., *Trade and markets in early empires* (Glencoe, Ill., 1957) and *Dahomey and the slave trade* (Seattle, 1966)).

³ For arguments about the distribution of income from groundnuts, see M. A. Klein, *Islam and imperialism in Senegal* (Stanford, 1968), 45–7; from palm oil, see U. I. Ukwu, 'The development of trade and marketing in Iboland', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1967, 3, 4, 647–62.

slave labour for the collection, manufacture and transportation, and the trust system for the export. Thus the increased production of palm oil and groundnuts in this period created no social revolution because, in spite of the pressures of abolitionists, the West African political, social, and economic systems proved able to meet the changing demands of the coastal trade through adaptation rather than revolution.

The abolitionists themselves came to recognize this. Most traders adjusted themselves to operate within the existing African political and socio-economic systems. They were usually linked with the coastal middlemen through the trust system, and they often joined in resisting attempts of other Europeans seeking to bypass the middlemen and penetrate into the interior. Domestic slavery came to be accepted as an essential part of the existing social system necessary for economic development. Even missionaries, who had at first opposed domestic slavery and would not accept owners of domestic slaves as members of their church, began to modify their views. From the 1840s until the late 1870s, there was to be heard little criticism of the system of domestic slavery. The Church Missionary Society formally pronounced that, while polygamy was an absolute sin capable of no amelioration, domestic slavery was a social evil that would be gradually ameliorated by the expansion of Christianity.¹ The missionary practice of buying slaves to be emancipated and used as servants, or the apprenticeship system practised in Sierra Leone and Liberia, or the indentured labour system (*régime des engagés à temps*) operated by the French in Senegal, were little different from domestic slavery.² Thus even the legal emancipation of slaves in the European enclaves was slow to produce significant changes. Accusations of slave-holding after emancipation, or of the recruitment of labour under conditions hardly distinguishable from slavery, were widespread in Lagos, Freetown and St Louis till the 1870s.³

¹ Ajayi, *Christian missions*, 105-8.

² R. Pasquier, 'À propos de l'émancipation des esclaves au Sénégal en 1848', *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer*, 1967, 54; F. Zuccarelli, 'Le régime des engagés à temps au Sénégal 1817-48', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 1962, 2, 3. One important side effect of the emancipation of slaves at Saint Louis and Gorée was that it favoured the incoming French business houses at the expense of the Creole community.

³ See J. U. J. Asiegbu, *Slavery and the politics of liberation, 1787-1861* (New York, 1969), in particular 38-47. He compares on p. 53 the British schemes for the emigration of freed slaves from Sierra Leone to the West Indies with the Victor Régis scheme for recruiting indentured labour from Dahomey for the French West Indian islands.

THE MISSIONARY IMPACT

The nineteenth century saw not only a great expansion of European trade in West Africa but also a spectacular growth of European and North American missionary activities. This urge to convert West Africans to Christianity was an important factor in the abolitionist movement. Evangelical Christianity operated partly as cause, partly as an effect of the movement. Some abolitionists in the early nineteenth century argued that the expansion of European trade and the spread of European customs and ideas must precede and induce in the African a frame of mind ready to accept Christianity. Others believed that Christianity should precede, pioneer and, through religious change, induce the Africans to desire European trade goods and European social and cultural values. All were agreed that in whatever order, Christianity, European commerce and 'civilization' were aspects of the same revolution that was about to sweep through Africa.¹ They expected a much more rapid and more far-reaching change than was ever to take place in West Africa in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the missionary movement was important in stimulating new interest in the European trading centres and in pushing European influence into the hinterland.

In Senegal, St Louis and Gorée had long been centres of unsuccessful attempts by Catholic religious orders to establish Christianity in West Africa. From about 1846 onwards, these missions were revived by the Holy Ghost Fathers. The area around the trading port of Bathurst in the Gambia became a centre of Methodist activities. However, Sierra Leone was the most important missionary centre of West Africa. The Nova Scotians, settlers from Canada, brought their own churches with them, and set the example for a significant later development of independent African churches. The Church Missionary Society began work in Sierra Leone in 1804 and the Methodists in 1811. Their work among the freed slave villages was of crucial importance. They helped to create out of the different linguistic groups from all over West Africa a new society dominated largely by English-speaking Christians, but with a distinctive social and religious life rooted in traditional African cultures.² In turn, their success in the villages created an opportunity for using Sierra Leone as a laboratory for the study of West African languages, from where interpreters, teachers and missionary agents

¹ T. F. Buxton, *The African slave trade and its remedy*, reprint (London, 1967).

² J. Peterson, *Province of Freedom: a history of Sierra Leone, 1787-1870* (London, 1969).

could be recruited for work in other parts of West Africa. In Liberia, the Methodist Episcopal and Protestant Episcopal Christians and the Southern Baptist Convention worked from the 1830s onwards, mostly among the Afro-American settlers and freed slaves, and later began to penetrate into the interior along the main rivers and trade routes.

On the Gold Coast, the Basel Mission (1828) and the Bremen (or North German) Mission (1847) were important in the areas around Accra and Aburi, and Keta. The most important centre, however, was Cape Coast, where the Methodists became well established in the 1830s and 1840s under the dynamic leadership of Thomas Birch Freeman. From there the Methodist Mission began to expand into Badagry and Whydah, and made tentative approaches to Asante. In Togo and Dahomey, the Basel and Bremen missions extended their activities to the Ewe, among whom they achieved some of their most significant successes in terms of conversion, education, and impact on the life and culture of the people. The Catholics from the Society of African Missions, having failed to establish themselves in Sierra Leone, reopened an old mission in Whydah in 1861.¹

In Nigeria, the missionaries concentrated their activities in three main areas. The CMS and Methodists came in through Badagry to Abeokuta in the 1840s. In 1851, having joined in inducing the British to intervene militarily in the disputed succession in Lagos, they moved in with Akintoye, the restored monarch. The Baptists arrived in 1853 and joined the movement into the Yoruba hinterland. The second area was the south-eastern corner of the country, Calabar and the Cross river basin, where Scottish Presbyterian missionaries concentrated their attention. The third area was the Niger valley, where the CMS established the Niger Mission in 1857, which was extended to the delta in 1861.

As far as conversion was concerned, there was no mass movement to join the Christian churches. The most significant successes were in the coastal European enclaves among freed slaves and trading communities, who saw in Christianity and close identification with European culture, an avenue to a new life with good commercial possibilities; St Louis, Freetown, Monrovia and Lagos thus became the leading centres of Christianity in West Africa. Yet, even in and around Freetown, in spite of the magisterial powers given to Christian pastors in the 1820s to compel attendance at church and to persecute anti-

¹ C. P. Groves, *The planting of Christianity in Africa*, 11 (London, 1957).

Christian behaviour, African cults and Islam survived, and traditional religious values retained an important influence over everyday behaviour even among the converts. Outside the European enclaves, missionaries were welcomed to settle in some places and rejected in others. In a few places, as at Abeokuta, depending on the political situation or the ability of the man himself, the missionary could become very influential. But while there were some few conversions, usually of domestic slaves, or of people uprooted by war or in other ways disadvantaged in society, there were no conversions of whole communities or of influential members of society. Some people took the attitude that the missionary approach to religion only represented yet another insight into the nature of the supernatural and tried to add the white man's deity to the pantheon of the gods. Children were sent to school or to live with the missionaries to become devotees of this new God or to learn new skills, such as the art of reading and writing. Thus by 1880, although the Christian missions had made useful contacts, and through their linguistic and educational work among the freed slaves sowed many potentially fruitful seeds, the Christian revolution had so far failed to get under way.

The missionaries became increasingly anxious to encourage European political control as a necessary step to securing social and religious change. As they moved beyond the European-controlled enclaves, either along the coast or into the interior, they were following the traders or encouraging the traders to follow them. The alliance of missionaries and traders, often using abolitionist arguments to secure the support and protection of their metropolitan governments, was the most important factor in the expansion of European influence in West Africa in this period.

IMPERIAL EXPANSION AND ABOLITION

European expansion followed two different paths: the expansion of areas under direct European control and power on the one hand and, on the other, the expansion, not of power but of influence among independent African states. The first method was initially favoured by the abolitionists. The aim was to multiply the number of forts and trading enclaves ruled and policed by Europeans; to cultivate areas around these colonies, where Europeans, Afro-Americans, freed slaves under European or American control, and others would trade, develop plantations, and establish a new type of society that would grow and, as the Euro-

pean colonies in America had come to dominate the continent, would eventually replace or absorb the various African states. Sierra Leone and Liberia were only the beginning of this movement. Both expanded along the coast, thanks to the naval patrols, but expansion inland was limited. It was the difficulties encountered by these settlements and the disastrous failure of other attempts, like that of the French on the Lower Senegal and of the British at the confluence of the Niger and Benue, that discouraged this idea. Economic growth was slow, and the high rate of mortality, the administrative difficulties and the hostility of neighbouring African states were all deterrents. The idea of direct control was therefore abandoned. The only other example was the annexation of Lagos, which was in a sense an extension of the colonization of Sierra Leone, dictated by the large number of Yoruba among the freed slaves in Sierra Leone, itself a result of the Yoruba wars of the early nineteenth century. But the Lagos example merely confirmed that, as far as the expansion of legitimate trade was concerned, nothing was to be gained from undermining existing African political and economic systems by extension of the areas under European control. It was better to co-operate with independent African states which were capable of expanding export trade through the use of domestic slaves. By 1865, a special committee of the British Parliament reported against further extension of direct control. Expansionist ardour roused by Captain Faidherbe was also at a low ebb in France until the late 1870s owing to internal divisions and the 1870 war with Germany.

Along the coast, co-operation with African states was secured in a number of ways. Usually the slave trade treaties included clauses guaranteeing freedom of movement for European traders and sometimes for missionaries as well. Some even included clauses for the abolition of such customs as human sacrifice, the killing of twins, panyarring (kidnapping for debt), trial by ordeal, and others judged repugnant to European susceptibilities and therefore bad for the expansion of 'legitimate' trade. The ability of naval patrols to enforce these clauses gave the naval officers and consular agents a basis for interfering in the internal affairs of the African states. They used the treaties to intervene in disputed successions, to enforce their own settlement of trade disputes, or to insist on particular trade policies or procedures for the regulation of trade and the resolution of trade conflicts. The best known example of this was in the Niger delta, where the exercise of European influence became institutionalized in the courts of equity. In

theory, these courts, consisting of the consul, European traders and local rulers, did not diminish the autonomy of the delta states, since they were constituted by treaty agreements and regulated only the external trade. However, the presence of the naval patrols meant that the consuls could enforce decisions of the courts even if the local rulers did not like them.¹

Farther inland, European influence depended on the good will of the rulers secured through missionaries, traders or the visits of envoys. Only in Senegal, because of the navigability of the river, was influence bolstered up not merely by the building of forts, but also by the use of troops recruited largely from freed slaves – the *tirailleurs Sénégalais* – officered by Europeans or *métis*. Through military action, the Moors were kept to the right bank of the river, al-Hājj ‘Umar barred from access to the river, treaties of protection signed with Walo, and Cayor put constantly under pressure. These military activities notwithstanding, Captain Faidherbe, the active governor of the French enclaves in Senegal from 1854 to 1861, did not extend the area of direct French control beyond the coastal communes. The political and economic systems of even the neighbouring states of Walo and Cayor, though changing internally from the impact of Muslim reformers, remained largely immune to abolitionist and French colonialist pressure. The French were not in a position to rule these states, or to interfere with the institution of domestic slavery on which their economy depended. Both states had to be reconquered when French political expansion began in earnest in the late 1870s.

The British on the Niger faced the hostility of the delta states, and this with the high rate of mortality in the rainy season proved effective in minimizing British naval action till the 1870s.² Naval power extended British influence along the lagoon east and west of Lagos, but rivalries with the French prevented further annexation. Expansion inland was discouraged by the expense and uncertainties of military action on land. The British relied on alliances and playing one state against another. Only on the Gold Coast, where the coastal states were weak and divided and there was a threat of their being engulfed by the more powerful Asante, did the British feel a challenge to face the difficulties of military expeditions. In 1824, Governor MacCarthy lost his life trying to check Asante expansion. His death was avenged in 1826. Thereafter, George Maclean acted as arbiter for the Fante states and

¹ Dike, *Trade and politics*.

² C. C. Ifemesia, ‘British enterprise on the Niger’, Ph.D. thesis (University of London, 1969).

built up a judicial system for resolving their differences. This was later extended and consolidated by treaties in which the chiefs allowed the British jurisdiction over offences which British traders and missionaries regarded as repugnant. As the British took over Danish and Dutch forts, the Fante increasingly challenged British jurisdiction. Hemmed in between rising British power and Asante threats, they tried to end their divisions and form a confederacy. It then appeared as if the British might be pushed out of the Gold Coast. In 1874, the British therefore mounted an expensive war, and defeated the Asante, but withdrew as the expense of military control was still beyond available local resources. Instead, the informal jurisdiction in Fanteland was converted into formal annexation.¹ This was one of the clearest signs that a new determination to expand political control in Africa was rising.

As the determination to move inland grew, the attitude to domestic slavery seemed also to change. African political and economic systems had proved able to supply an increasing volume of legitimate trade, but had, as we have seen, insisted on confining European power to the coastal enclaves. Arising largely out of intra-European rivalries, European ambitions in Africa now went beyond the increase of 'legitimate' trade. It became necessary to stake out claims for the future, to prospect for minerals, to build railways, and to participate directly in the trade and agricultural development of the interior. African states began to be criticized for being small, for restricting trade with too many toll posts, for frequent closures of roads, and exclusion of foreigners from particular markets. Domestic slavery began to be attacked, and encouragement given to slaves of hostile African neighbours to escape and seek emancipation. In this way, constabularies and armed police, as well as porters of European goods and cannon for the inland advance, began to be built up on the coast. The abolitionist slogans proliferated. Middlemen traders and coastal rulers like Jaja, Nana, and others who opposed these moves were denounced as slave traders and removed in the 1880s, even though it was known they had never taken part in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As the Europeans penetrated into the Sudan belt, the Islamic states were also portrayed as oppressive and decadent, having departed from the ideals of their founders and having no other function but to raid for slaves. Slaves were encouraged to riot and desert, and were turned into soldiers to be used against their former masters.²

¹ Page, *A history of West Africa*, 142–6.

² See for example F. N'Diaye, 'La colonie du Sénégal au temps de Brière de l'Isle (1876–1881)', *Bulletin de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire*, series B, 1968, 30, 2.

Yet as British and French rule began to take shape, the predominant attitude was to be cautious in the emancipation of domestic slaves, so as not to injure the economy of the newly acquired territories. Emancipation was phased. Slaves were encouraged to buy their own freedom; their children were declared free, but only on reaching manhood after a period of apprenticeship. Fear of brigandry and indiscipline through sudden emancipation led to the establishment of 'Freed slaves' homes' or 'Villages de liberté' which were in fact sources for recruiting labour for the colonial masters.¹ In some cases, as in the delta, much to the chagrin of missionaries, the initial move was not towards emancipation but towards strengthening the hands of the masters over the slaves. In fact, emancipation of domestic slaves was a gradual process that took place, not in the nineteenth, but in the twentieth century.

CONCLUSION

The intention of the abolitionists to change the face of West Africa had not made much progress by 1870. The European presence on the coast had become significant. The trans-Atlantic slave trade, at least, had come to an end and the whole trans-Saharan trade was declining. West Africa, from being essentially northward looking, began to turn more attention to European trade, missionary activities and other influences from the coast. Sierra Leone, Liberia, the four communes of Senegal, Bathurst, the Gold Coast forts, Lagos, and other European enclaves were expanding, but not yet to the extent of threatening the political and economic systems of the surrounding African states. The basis of European power was not military but naval. This restricted European power to the coastal enclaves, discouraged much expansion and encouraged co-operation with independent African states. As a result, the area of direct European power was severely limited and the theme of abolition was marginal except along the coast. For most of West Africa, the Islamic advance in the Sudan belt and the internal politics of the states of the forest zone were far more significant.

¹ F. de Kersaint-Gilly, 'Essai sur l'évolution de l'esclavage en Afrique Occidentale Française', *Bulletin du Comité d'Études Historiques et Scientifiques de l'Afrique Occidentale Française*, 1924, 7; D. Bouche, 'Les villages de liberté en A.O.F.', *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire*, series B, 1949, 11. G. O. Olusanya, 'The freed slaves' homes', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1966, 3, 3.