

The Aftermath of Slavery: Transitions and Transformations in Southeastern Nigeria

a book review

by

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Chima Korieh and Femi J. Kolapo eds., *The Aftermath of Slavery: Transitions and Transformations in Southeastern Nigeria* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007). iv + 261pp. Maps, pictures, tables, index.

The abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade produced far-reaching political, social and economic consequences in Europe, Africa and the New World. And scholars have done considerably well in examining this aspect of world history. A close look at the large and growing body of literature on this subject indicates that more studies have to be conducted on the impact of the abolition on specific regions of the three continents - especially in Africa. In other words, research agendas that favor the examination of the subject in specific parts of the continents is capable of enhancing better knowledge of the effects of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from a micro-study perspective.

The Aftermath of Slavery, a ten-chapter volume edited by Chima Korieh (Marquette University) and Femi J. Kolapo (University of Guelph) fills this yawning gap in the historiography of African history, African Diaspora history and Pan-African Studies. Thus both specialist and non-specialist readers will find the data and arguments of the contributors helpful in understanding the impact of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade on the peoples of modern southeastern Nigeria. Instructively, Korieh and Kolapo add value to the content of the book as they conduct a nuance review of existing literature on abolition of the slave trade in Africa at large. This exercise helps to adequately locate the contribution of this book to scholarship while creating an easy and digestible argument and narrative for readers who want a jumpstart on this huge and expanding field.

In chapter one Waibinte Wariboko parades a large body of useful archival materials to explicate how the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade introduced new forms of tension between African middlemen and the rulers on the one hand and British traders and consuls on the other. To be sure, the new pattern of relations between and among Africans and Europeans, which culminated into the collapse of indigenous political authority in this part of modern Nigeria, represents one of the numerous phases of Africa's interactions with the wider world.

And the creative ingenuity of Africans as Wariboko has shown reflected in the ways they responded to the introduction of palm oil and other articles of trade generally christened as "legitimate" commerce. In his chapter, Korieh examines the implications of the transition on gender relations, arguing that: "While the political and economic impacts of the transition have received significant treatment in the literature, several social formations that followed in the wake of the transition such as the implication for gender relations have not" (p. 42). Korieh is able to show that women like men were active participants in the new forms of social and political relations of the period. U.D. Anyanwu identifies the inadequate scholarly attention given to the demographic impact of the abolition and thus examines two settlement patterns, which emerged as a result of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in southeastern Nigeria.

Chapter four authored by Kolapo explicates the transformation canoe transport took during this period, showing that like all aspects of the economy, the canoe industry had to adjust to the new economic and political order. And continuing, Raphael Chijioke Njoku smartly examines the impact of Igbo slaves on the sociopolitical and economic transformations of delta communities: "Reminiscent of the anxieties raised about the American post-abolition society, the overwhelming number of Igbo slaves in the Niger Delta over this period created what the local elites had perceived as 'an Igbo peril – the threat of indigenous culture being polluted by the alien culture of servile Igbo elements'" (p. 117). It seems development in the Niger Delta during this period is similar to the situation in most parts of the world. The majority/citizens are mostly poised to protect their culture from being stamped by aliens. And for the Igbo in Niger Delta, the stigma of servitude orchestrated public stigmatization.

Next, J. Akuma-Kalu Njoku, Ikem Stanley Okoye, Innocent F.A Uzoechi, Nkparom Ejituwu and Michael Echeruo explore methodological and historiographical issues. J. Akuma-Kalu Njoku opines that songs, proverbs, place and personal names and oral narratives are embodiments of memory and group knowledge of the trans-Atlantic slave trade that historians can use for reconstructing this aspect of African and African Diaspora history. He makes adequate reference (sometimes based on personal experiences) to the resilience and survival of oral narratives, which explains the nature of relations among various categories of peoples during the period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Constructively, Innocent F. A. Uzoechi in his chapter discusses the vocabulary of Niger Delta historiography, and thus, explores the terminologies and words developed through diplomatic practice, commercial life and social organization between Africans, Europeans, and among Africans. Ejituwu's chapter examines the major arguments of the scholarly works of Kenneth Onwuka Dike, E.J Alagoa and G.I Jones in which Dike and Jones open discussion on historical scholarship and thus examines the political and economic impact of transition from slave trade to "legitimate" commerce, as Alagoa's scholarship focus on the use of oral traditions in reconstructing the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and Nigerian history in general; and finally, Michael Echeruo ends the book with a chapter on Aro and Nri relations.

In short, the content make this book a good read on African history and the African Diaspora, and with its many tables, charts, pictures and maps it provides readers with better understanding of the themes discussed by its contributors. And although there are noticeable disparities in the length of the chapters, this limitation does not undermine the credibility of this important book.