

Capability Distribution and Onset of the 1869 Bonny War*

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INTRODUCTION

In 1869 Bonny in the Eastern Niger Delta area of present-day Nigeria fought a civil war which split it into component parts. This came at a time when most West Africa states were experiencing the transition from slave trade to 'legitimate commerce.' For this reason, explanations of the war were often given in the broad context of the impact of the commercial transition on coastal West African states. Scholars such as Anthony G. Hopkins (1968: 580-606; 1973: 125-6, 135-64) look at the 1869 war and the endemic Yoruba wars in the nineteenth century as parts of the 'crisis of adaptation' of coastal trading states, which left them vulnerable to European annexation. On the other hand, students like Jacob Ade Ajayi and Ralph A. Austen (1972:303-6) are protagonists of the view that the structure of the palm-oil (legitimate) trade in the Delta was virtually the same as that of the slave trade. Hence, commercial transition does not offer an explanation for wars in Bonny and Yorubaland (Law 1993: 91-115; 1995: 1-31).

These debates on legitimate commerce are compelling, have raged on for decades, and become one of the 'central themes in the historiography of western Africa.' They in turn provide the context and fuel for a second-order level of debate concerning the role of alliance, the weakening of central authority and power maximization in the nineteenth-century Bonny conflict. Despite this double-deck contention, a consensus position appears to have emerged. The current thinking is that at the minimum the transition from slaving to produce trading that produced new economic forces (leaders, not necessarily new structures) like Jaja and Oko Jumbo realigned the old political structures of Bonny. Thus, today no historian familiar with the recent researches would argue that the war was primarily due to the transition to the non-slave trade (Lynn 1995a: 57-77). Having said this, we will avoid the big 'transition debate,' and rather focus attention on differential rates of internal development within each canoe house as the principal means of change in power in 1860s Bonny. The second orientation of this paper is to provide a tentative testing of the connection between relative capabilities and the identity of the conflict initiator in nineteenth-century Bonny rather than present an original historical account of the 1869 war. Finally, this paper aims to reverse the current assumptions in the formidable set of published works on this event and its context,

and to add to the historical understanding on an important topic which has been subject to considerable debate among historians of Nigeria.

A study of the historical analyses of the 1869 civil war in Bonny reveals that there is a confusion over the relevant unit of analysis. Theories of the war have been formulated either at the class, house or systemic levels of analysis, and until now, no attempt has been made towards unification. This study presents an analysis of the nineteenth century war at a unified analytical level. The results indicate that the war was associated with increasing diffusion of power in the nineteenth-century Bonny. The thrust of the reasoning is that the trade, which unequally affected the growth capability of various houses, undermined the foundations of order and the hegemonic power concentration in the main, leading Manilla Pepple House/royal house. Preponderance of power and wealth in the leading house had heretofore prevented systemic wars.

This paper goes beyond a serious limitation of the existing literature on the war. The debate on the causes of the war is inadequate in one crucial respect. That is, in its failure to account for the timing of the conflict. Why did the war erupt in 1869 and not before or after? We can only answer this question satisfactorily, if we understood the impact of trade (the main economic activity in Bonny) on the differential or uneven house growth capability. The timing of the war is associated with the Anna Pepple House's wealth surpassing the wealth of the Manilla Pepple House, and the desire of previously dominant canoe houses (Manilla Pepple and the royal house) to prevent Jaja, the leader of the Anna Pepple House, from extracting concessions from them.

The present work differs from previous historical analyses of the war in its consideration of the principal source of change in power in nineteenth-century Bonny society. Most of earlier works considered the formation of alliance or coalitions as critical to the onset of the war arguing that alliances did play a major role in the initiation of the 1869 war. This paper argues that internal development within each canoe house through the accumulation of wealth is the principal means of change in power. The point is that allies did not make substantive difference in the onset of 1869 war.

This paper is also an extension of power transition theory (Organski and Kugler 1980) to a well-known African war, which was not associated with change in international leadership. However, the Bonny war did impinge on system leadership in the Eastern Niger Delta in Southern Nigeria before the onset of British colonialism. The study points out the relevance of power transition theory in understanding a major African war that has generated disparate explanations; and it focuses on the relationship between differential growth rates in capabilities and the identity of the conflict initiator. Previous explanations were limited by focusing strictly on one issue or one impact (slavery or religion, for instance) when a comprehensive dynamic process was at work. What this paper essentially accomplishes is the application of the theory to an old body of data to explain causality. In doing this I have used the power transition model to query extant

explanations, to re-interpret old data and reach new implications, and to extend our understanding of the events that led to the 1869 Bonny war. It is germane to state that this analysis does not take into account broader issues of state formation and their relationship to competing political-economic units within Bonny, which might be of interest in interpreting the outcome of the nineteenth-century warfare.

1. THE 1869 BONNY CIVIL WAR

Between 1850 and 1880 the states in the Eastern Niger Delta and the Efik state of Calabar on the Cross River witnessed three major internal political crises: the blood brothers' disturbance of 1851 in Calabar; the 1869 civil war in Bonny, where Anna Pepple House under the leadership of Chief Jaja was pitted against Manilla Pepple House led by Chief Oko Jumbo; and 1879 succession attempts of Chief Will Braide in Elem Kalabari (Dike 1956: 153-165; Alagoa 1971: 565-570). We would focus on the Bonny civil war as it had more lasting effect on the politics of the Eastern Niger Delta, and more importantly it reshaped the foundations of order of the hegemony of Bonny, the most powerful kingdom in nineteenth-century Eastern Niger Delta and its hinterland.

The seed of the rivalry between Manilla Pepple House and Opubo Anna Pepple House was sowed in eighteenth century. Perekule (King Pepple I, *amanyanabo* of Bonny) established his new dynasty in the eighteenth century when he succeeded the earlier kingship of King Awusa. Perekule had three sons, Ibulu (Best), Fubara and Opubo. He established canoe houses for each of them as befitted a king. On his death, his wealth was split between three canoe houses¹, thus weakening the Pepple Royal House. Worse of it, the three canoe houses not only competed among themselves, but each had to compete with rival houses outside of the royal group. Skipping the first son Ibulu, the royal house elected Fubara Manilla Pepple to succeed Perekule after the latter's death. Fubara died without leaving behind an heir to succeed him. So his younger brother Opubo Anna Pepple became the king (1792-1830).² Both Fubara and Opubo were successful merchants on their own right who had powerful trading canoe houses before ascending the throne of their father.³ On ascending the throne of *amanyanabo* each of Perekule's sons had to

¹ Canoe house is a lineage-based trading corporation. It was also a military organization as it manned and maintained a war canoe. In addition, it was a social and administrative unit within the city-states of the Niger Delta.

² Susan M. Hargreaves argues that Opubo succeeded in 1815/16 (not 1792), and his brother, Fubara in 1807. See Hargreaves (1987: 140-144).

³ Cooney (1974: 30-31). Hargreaves has contested the widely stated assertion that Fubara and Opubo had their own houses before ascending to the throne. She argues that Ibani and Maduka created Anna Pepple and Manilla Pepple houses out of sections of the royal house. See Hargreaves (1987: 184-195).

relinquish the headship of his private house. The tradition in eighteenth-century Bonny was that on assuming office new kings had to transfer the control of their own houses to trusted and able members (slaves or freemen) of their houses (Alagoa 1971: 570; Dike 1956: 69). Fubara transferred the management of his house to an ex-slave Ibaniburufia (Ibani) who grew the Manilla Pepple House to be the most prosperous and most powerful house in Bonny. Through Ibani's industry six more houses were created within the Manilla Pepple House. Opubo gave up the control of his own house to an ex-slave, Chief Maduka (Madu). Kenneth Dike (1956) described Madu as "a man of rare ability, religiously dedicated to the service of the monarch." With Opubo assisting him Madu transformed the Opubo Anna Pepple House to a formidable rival of the Manilla Pepple House. Under Madu's leadership and inspiration, the Opubo Anna Pepple House expanded to include six satellite houses (Cookey 1974: 32; Jones 1963: 123).

The tradition of transferring control of houses of new kings to members of their houses (often ex-slaves) provided a veritable platform for ambitious ex-slaves to challenge their kings and throw the Bonny political system into turmoil. One of such challenges occurred after the death of Opubo, during the ascension to the kingship by his son William Dappa Pepple, Perekule IV. William, born in 1817,⁴ was considered a minor when his father Opubo died in 1830 and had to wait for years to ascend the royal throne. He was elected to the post in 1835. In the adjoining period Chief Madu (briefly with Ibani as co-regent) managed the kingdom. Madu grew accustomed to the royal office, became despotic, and was very reluctant to invite William to come on the throne. In 1835, on the wave of popular demand the eighteen year-old son of Opubo was crowned as the new king. As a teenager William did not have the resources to establish an independent house, so Manilla Pepple and European traders who were eager to end the despotic reign of Madu raised the necessary men, material and money for him (Cookey 1974: 33). This was the beginning of the conflict that metamorphosed into the 1869 civil war. When Madu passed away in 1836, his son Alali succeeded him as the head of the Anna Pepple House. Alali was to continue the struggle of his father against the king.

The young William was not very good at building cohesion between the two descendant houses of Perekule. He did not try to build a political base by taking side in the conflict between the two houses. He prided himself as being neutral, counting on European traders at the Bonny coast for support. The Opubo Anna Pepple House, led by Alali, opposed him, whereas the Manilla Pepple House supported him. But they combined forces when he ventured against their interests and asked for his deportation in 1854. In this alliance they got the support of the British consul, John Beecroft who was eager to encroach on the independence and sovereignty of the Bonny kingdom. William was sent to Fernanda Po, Ascension Island, Sierra Leone and London. John Beecroft installed Dapuye (a grand-son of

⁴ Hargreaves (1987: 138-140) doubts if this was the actual birth year.

King Opubo) from the Anna Pepple House as the new ruler of the kingdom. Neither Oko Jumbo of Manilla House nor Alali, the heads of the two most powerful houses, could have been made king. Bonny unwritten constitution did not permit an ex-slave to become a king. Dapuye quickly came under the control of Alali who was determined to use the puppet king ruler to settle political score with the members of the Manilla Pepple House. Dapuye did not last for a long time. He died in 1855 paving the way for the eventual restoration of William Dappa Pepple to the kingship in 1861. In the intervening period a four-member council of regents, consisting of representatives of the four most powerful houses in Bonny, Manilla Pepple, Anna Pepple, Ada Allison and Captain Hart, administered the kingdom. In 1861, when King William Dappa Pepple returned, not everyone welcomed him with opened hands. Iloli, the then head of the Anna Pepple, and a member of the quartumvirate regency council and his supporters were bitterly opposed to Pepple's restoration, though the other houses and European traders had asked for the return of William. Iloli did not want to see the man who disgraced his father (Madu) restored as the king. In any case, William was restored to his post. But he did not live long thereafter. Seven years of exile took its toll on William and he died in 1866. William's son, George took over the reins of the office that had become a shadow of its former itself. During his father's exile, a civil war (in 1855) had broken out between Anna Pepple House and the Manilla Pepple House. In the ensuing fracas William's property, trading goods and money stored at home (there was no bank in Bonny) were gutted by fire. In addition, in the absence of William his trading operations fell into utter disrepair. When George took over in 1866, the control of the two arms of the royal family was in the grip of two bitter foes: Oko Jumbo and Jaja. Oko Jumbo, a powerful ex-slave and head of the Manilla Pepple House, was an ardent supporter of the monarch. Manilla Pepple was now indisputably the dominant power in the kingdom, having more money, men and materiel than Anna Pepple did (Cookey 1974: 47).

Iloli died in 1862 and the Anna Pepple house was without a ruler for nearly two years, because none of its prominent managers wanted to take on the responsibility of settling huge debts he had incurred. Then in 1863 an unknown trader, an ambitious ex-slave, was elected to head the Anna Pepple House. This election suddenly threw the 42-year-old Igbo ex-slave Jaja into the vortex of politics of the most powerful kingdom in Eastern Niger Delta. Jaja, a man of immense personal charm, was an astute and energetic merchant and an expert in the art of building political support for his course. Within a year of succeeding Iloli he had created twenty new chiefs - meaning that he vastly increased the wealth of the Anne Pepple House. In another twelve months he had paid off all the huge trade debts incurred by Iloli (De Cardi 1899: 528). Within this two-year period he also visited the neighbouring communities of Bonny who lived along the routes to the lucrative oil markets and made lavish gifts to their chiefs and leaders, thus enhancing his popularity and reputation in these communities and in his own house. According to one British observer at Bonny, Jaja became the most "influential man and the

greatest trader in the area.”⁵ Jaja’s success in improving the fortune of the Anna Pepple House aroused the ire and jealousy of the Manilla Pepple House. Jaja did not only improve the economic capability of the Anna Pepple House he was also absorbing independent houses in the kingdom. It was the combination of his increasing economic fortunes and success that attracted other weak, independent houses to be affiliated with the Anna Pepple House. In some cases, ties of financial dependence drew them in. Jaja had paid off the debts of some of them and advanced trading capital to others. By the end of 1864 Jaja had added a total of 15 houses to the seven that existed when he became the head of the Anna Pepple House. “If we allow this to go on, said his opponents, ‘the whole of Bonny will soon belong to Anna Pepple.’”⁶ Jaja was forced to renounce the adhesion of other houses by the treaty of January 7, 1865.⁷ He was not ready for trouble and preferred to settle any dispute with Manilla Pepple House amicably. This was only temporary as he resumed adding impoverished independent houses to the Anna Pepple House soon thereafter. For whatever reason, the majority of the houses he was forced to give up remained firmly behind the Anna Pepple House. Jaja’s tactics and King William Dapper’s inability to settle matters between the two rival houses increasingly raised tension in the city. Anna Pepple and Manilla houses became engaged in an armaments race, reasoning that the long time rivalry between them would be settled at the battlefield.

On Sunday, September 12, 1869 Jaja issued a war declaration. Managers of the Manilla Pepple House decided against fighting Jaja on a Sunday. So on September 13, 1869, led by Oko Jumbo, they launched attacks against Jaja’s fortified positions.⁸ Cannons began to boom, shots started to fly in all directions, the long awaited showdown commenced. The civil war to shape and reshape the system leadership had begun in the most powerful kingdom in the Eastern Niger Delta. Within a few days Jaja had accepted defeat and led out of Bonny the Anna Pepple House and other houses affiliated to it. But this turned out to be a ploy to gain time to cut off Bonny from its vital trade routes.⁹ He had made a pretense of fighting to

⁵ Burton to Russel, 8 Aug. 1864 F. O. 2/45. Confidential. The British Consul, Sir Richard Burton had written, “He is young, healthy, and powerful, and not less ambitious, energetic, and decided. He is most influential man and the greatest trader in the River, and £50,000, it is said, may annually pass through his hands. He lives much with Europeans, and he rides roughshod over young hands coming to Bonny. In a short time he will either be shot or he will beat down all his rivals. At present he leads the party against King Pepple.”

⁶ Livingstone to Stanley, July 13, 1867. F.O. 84/1277

⁷ Herslet Treaties Vol. XIII.

⁸ C.M.S. CA 3/010 N0. 4. Mr. Carew’s Diary. Quoted in Hargreaves (1987: 240).

⁹ However, S. J. S Cooley has stated that it was not a planned evacuation as most writers have stated. It was a “precipitate departure” of a defeated army. Jaja’s ego and pride would not let him continue in the town as a defeated chief who had lost some influence, so he decided to settle his

give himself time to retreat to a new location and continue the war in a different form. He settled his people near Andoni, took control of the supply routes that led to Bonny's best palm oil markets and placed a crippling embargo on Bonny. The Bonny economy, which was heavily dependent on trade, was hard hit. The economic effect of the militarily enforced embargo was so devastating on the Bonny economy that the British Consul for the Niger Delta, Livingstone, who was not a favourite of Jaja, advised Bonny chiefs to entice Anna Pepple House back into the city with liberal concessions. Failing this, he feared, Bonny would sink to the "condition of a third rate or fourth rate African kingdom, instead of being a first rate state."¹⁰ The government of Bonny could not lure Jaja back. This was the beginning of a precipitous decline of Bonny in the hierarchy of states in the Eastern Niger Delta. Opobo, Jaja's new city-state, rose and became the new hegemonic power in the Eastern Niger Delta and its hinterland.

In sum, the above narrative shows that rivalry between houses was nothing new in Bonny politics and certainly long predated the development of legitimate trade. This paper must therefore establish why the long-standing rivalry erupted into a systemic war in 1869. Or, to put it another way, why this rivalry did not erupt into systemic war earlier?

2. PREVIOUS EXPLANATIONS OF THE 1869 WAR

Why did the 1869 war occur? What is the explanation, the fundamental cause of the war? What social and economic forces were behind the rivalry? Dike, who undertook the pioneering research on the war, said it was a slave revolt. "The Bonny internal rebellion formed part of the upheaval that agitated the Niger Delta; between 1850 and 1875 every city-state witnessed some sort of civil commotion initiated by the liberated ex-slaves. At Bonny it occurred twice in that period: in 1855 and 1869." (Dike 1956: 151) According to Dike's interpretation, although Britain destroyed the transatlantic slave trade, internal domestic slaves had to fight the anachronisms in the Bonny political system. Ex-slaves had to struggle for their freedom, to be liberated from intolerable social and political constraints imposed upon them. The ex-slaves began to challenge authority, when they discovered that "from their ranks were derived the richest traders, the bravest soldiers, and the ablest commanders, and on their labours entirely depended the economic welfare of the city-states." (Dike 1956: 153)

people out of Bonny. See Cooley (1974: 66-68).

¹⁰ Livingstone to Claredon, 4 Dec. 1869. F.O. 84/1308 No. 37. Livingstone reported that Bonny chiefs said to him that if they had known "what they know now, they would never have fought with Ja Ja."

Gwilym I. Jones' (1963) work cast serious doubts on Dike's theory. Jones showed that the social character of the main protagonists in the war was similar. He attributed the civil war to factional rather than class conflicts between Manilla Pepple and Anna Pepple houses. Though Jones accepted that there was a social distinction in nineteenth-century Bonny, he, however, showed that the two leading houses were derived from the royal household and were both under slave leadership at the time. The division between the Anna Pepple and Manilla Pepple Houses was analysed in terms of a cyclical pattern of political development in the Eastern Niger Delta. In the 'segmentary' society of Bonny, the development of canoe houses tended to follow the principle of 'binary division' in that any house which unduly expanded in size would, through a process of planned segmentation, split into two.

Susan Hargreaves (1987), in a relatively new study maintains that the nature of Bonny political economy was too complex for Dike and Jones' interpretations to hold. She challenged their explanations as too simplistic and as such do not do justice to the degree of politicking and maneuvering of the protagonists. In the 1830, and up to the 1850s, the major slave houses (the *opuwari*) were united against the monarch, whilst the free classes or the representatives of the *duowari* ('freeborn') houses were against the usurpation of the monarchy by ex-slave house heads. It was only in mid 1850s, when the monarchy had been 'destroyed,' that the factional conflicts between the Manilla Pepple and the Anna Pepple came to the fore. Manilla Pepple, after losing membership of the regency, moved in support of the monarch to let the king gain ascendancy over the Anna Pepple House. By the 1869 civil war many of the *duowari* houses were in support of Jaja against the monarch. Many of the 'freeborn' houses used the civil war to escape with Jaja from Bonny. Events after the civil war showed that the Manilla Pepple House, led by Oko Jumbo, was against the monarch and tried to usurp the kinship. Asserting the multi-dimensional nature of political conflicts in Bonny, Hargreaves maintained that the war was a result of incessant struggle for political supremacy by slave houses that dominated trade, shifting political alliances and realignments of interest.

Ebiegberi Alagoa (1971) has also poked holes in Dike's theory, finding it to be too simplistic. He argues that the slave revolt theory can not be applied to the events in 1860s Bonny. "It may be noted", he said, " that the men of slave origin involved in these upheavals in Bonny were all men who had attained positions of leadership in Bonny political life. They had risen through the ranks. In addition, these men could not become more emancipated than they already were. In fact they had no interest in the liberation of slaves since they have themselves become masters of slaves and rulers over freemen. Finally, it may be noted that each of the faction was led by men of slave origin and each faction had slaves and free members."(Alagoa 1971: 570) Alagoa has his own interpretation of the 1869 war. He opined that the upheaval occurred, because, whereas the canoe house system in the Eastern Delta states had worked out a system of growth by binary division, it was yet to work out an accepted procedure for overall political leadership. At the canoe-house level the house expanded by division into two. The house increased in

size by birth and by recruiting new members through marriages or through the purchase of slaves. When the population and wealth of the house had reached a certain level it would produce a subsidiary house by means of planned segmentation. A wealthy trader, who had supported the growth and expansion of his house, would be encouraged to go off peacefully to start his own separate canoe house allied to the mother-house in state affairs. A canoe house continued to function as long as it was dynamic, flourishing and profitable. A prosperous, senior canoe house would spin off sub-canoe houses, which houses kept their connections with the parent-canoe house. If a young canoe house became more prosperous than its parent did, it absorbed the parent house and in turn became the senior house. An unsuccessful canoe house folded up, voluntarily merged with another, or was acquired by another house. Alagoa contended that this kind of orderly arrangement had not been worked out for political leadership at the centre. He also attributed the war in Bonny and other social problems in the 1860s and 1870s in the Eastern Niger Delta to the “difficulties the ruling groups faced in changing from an economy based on the slave trade to one based on palm produce.”(Alagoa 1989: 731)

Alagoa’s theory appears on the surface to be different from Dike’s, but both theories are cut from the same cloth. Both historians believe that the organization and conduct of legitimate commerce was substantially different from slave trade. Second, legitimate commerce unleashed unprecedented forces of social mobility and change in the Eastern Delta states. Finally, the political upheavals in these states were linked to the social mobility. (Cookey 1980: 84)

Sylvanus Cookey (1980) who has carefully studied the relationships and products in the years before and during the nineteenth century in the Eastern Niger Delta states, and who has closely examined the social mobility and politics in Niger Delta in the second half of the nineteenth century, proffered a different explanation of the 1869 war. The cause was a gradual weakening of the centre, the office of the *amanyanabo*. The war was not a struggle by rising class of ex-slaves to gain political power or to be appointed to the highest office of the land. Nor did the legitimate trade, the trade in palm oil, cause it. (Cookey 1980: 83-90) He argued that the cause of the war hacks back to certain political changes that were made in the eighteenth century. About the middle of the eighteenth century Amakiri in Elem Kalabari and Perekule in Bonny became kings. Many ex-slaves in both city-states rose to positions of power, prestige and prominence with the ascendancy of these two men. Amakiri and Pepple, in order to bolster their own houses and gain more political control, made their sons and many industrious ex-slaves heads of new canoe houses. Cookey (1980: 88) says:

“It was thus the period when the trans-Atlantic slave trade was at its height that the largest number of ex-slaves also rose to prominence in the city states as founders of canoe houses. The tradition had thus become well-established that ex-slaves could attain positions of prestige within the city states before the introduction of the trade in palm oil. Incidentally, the initiative came not from

the ex-slaves but from the rulers; hence it cannot be maintained that a revolutionary change was being imposed by the 'lower classes.'

Having set aside the slave revolt theory and the explanation based on the strains and stresses imposed on Niger Delta's political system by legitimate commerce, Cookey offered his own explanation. The civil war broke out because the personality and resources at the centre were not sufficient to contain and moderate rivalries between canoe houses that sought to dominate or control the political system. The office of the *amanyanabo* had been weakened and therefore could not contain centrifugal forces that adhered in the political system.

According to Cookey, there were three reasons that accounted for the weakening of the office of the king, *amanyanabo*. First, in the eighteenth century, rules relating succession to the office of the *amanyanabo* in both Bonny and Kalabari were changed by Perekule and Amakiri respectively. Before the rise of these two leaders the kingship was elective and was conferred on the most successful and outstanding businessman with popular support and with an ability to lead the people, or the kingship was opened to the ablest of the canoe house chiefs. But Perekule and Amakiri were able to subvert this procedure to vest the office in their own lineages. Henceforth, only their direct sons and descendants could aspire to the highest office. Amakiri and Perekule were able to do this because of the enormous wealth they accumulated from the slave trade and because of the vital political support they enjoyed from their sons and ex-slaves, who rose to prominence in the city states as founders of canoe houses under their (Amakiri and Perekule) tutelage. Second, the tradition was that a new king in Bonny and Kalabari did not inherit the entire economic resources of his predecessor. He ruled primarily on the basis of the wealth of his own canoe house and what he could accumulate in his new role. This meant that the new king was in most cases not an economic force, compared to other long established houses in the system. Finally, the headship of the main canoe house from which the preceding *amanyanabo* came from was passed to another person, likely an ex-slave. The result of all these was the weakening of the office of the *amanyanabo* in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

Cookey's narratives, like Dike's, emphasize alliance and allegiance as critical for the maintenance of order and to the onset of the war. As the narrative goes, the Manilla Pepple House did not like Jaja absorbing independent houses and upsetting the established balance of powers by the formation of alliance, whereas Jaja was bent on securing the alliance and allegiance of these houses in order to move up in the power hierarchy. "Jaja saw the advantage of securing their [independent houses] allegiance. If the canoe-house he led was to attain a preeminent position in Bonny vis-à-vis the powerful Manilla Pepple canoe-house, it had to enlarge the number of houses which it could muster in emergence." (Cookey 1974: 53; Dike 1956: 186; Jaja 1991: 1-2) This kind of thinking limits the analysis to the level of systems. The motives of decision-makers are limited to maximization of power. Strong houses try to expand, while impoverished houses seeking to protect themselves from

aggression tie up with strong houses to increase not only their political power, but also their offensive and defensive capabilities. We think that this is not the source of the war. The source is to be found in the differences in the rate of growth of capabilities of Bonny canoe houses. The combination of differences in growth rate of capabilities, general dissatisfaction with its position in the system, and a desire to change the prevailing order and the associated division of values was the factor that led the Anna Pepple House to challenge the foundations of order in Bonny. There is no doubt that alliance, or the formation of coalitions, and reactions to them were important in understanding the politics of the nineteenth century Bonny. But it is not entirely persuasive, as explanation based on it ignores the internal development (wealth accumulation) within each canoe house, which was the principal means of change in power in the nineteenth-century Bonny society.

Writing as late as 1995, Martin Lynn, following Cookey, attributed the war to factionalism and weakening of the office of *amanyanabo*. This work, which did not add to the historical account of the nineteenth-century Bonny politics and the 1869 war, was only more eloquent than Cookey in stating that Bonny's remarkable economic growth in the nineteenth century and its continued political instability were caused by rivalry between houses for trade success. Even at that, Lynn only saw the growth of palm oil or legitimate trade as an added dimension to a polity riven by endemic factionalism. (Lynn 1995b: 169-192) Contrarily, this paper argues that trade which unequally affected the growth of various canoe houses should be the main focus of any serious study of the war.

E. A. Ayandele, writing in the 1960s, did not consider trade as his main focus in his study of the 1869 war. He posited that it was a religious war (Ayandele 1966: 71-76). Jaja, a defender of traditional religion, was pitted against Oko Jumbo and King George, recent recruits of Christianity. Here is clearly an over exaggeration of the influence of religion in Bonny. We wonder why in a society, in which the house head's political position was dependent on and coterminous with economic success, Ayandele chose to ignore the interaction between ebb and flow of economic fortunes and political conflicts. Not that he was unaware of the changing economic fortunes of the main protagonists. In fact, he maintained that the backbone of Jaja's economic success and the concomitant political dominance was Jaja's adherence to traditional religion. But Ayandele failed to investigate the connection between this 'religion induced' economic success of Jaja and the consequent overtaking of Manilla Pepple House by the Anna Pepple House on one hand, and the initiation of the 1869 civil war on the other.

A careful study of the Bonny civil war would reveal that there were many parts to it. There were aspects of slave revolt, failure of the Eastern Niger Delta canoe house system to work out an acceptable procedure for overall political leadership, the weakening of the office of the *amanyanabo* and perhaps the religious conflict. These aspects are not easily discernable; their identification depends on the unit of analysis. This multidimensional and opaque nature of the Bonny saga has made previous writers to focus on any one of the four aspects. They failed to see the

whole picture and, as in the story of the blind men and the elephant, each proclaimed that the part he saw was the whole of the Bonny elephant. We would shed light on the discussion and assemble the puzzle of the 1869 war neatly together with the aid of the analytical tool of power transition theory.

None of the earlier writers was able to see all the four aspects together and beyond because they did not consider the relationship between power distribution and war. Yet they were analysing a society where power relations were not permanent and differences in the rate of wealth accumulation ensured that there would be shifts in the inter-house distribution of power that undermined the foundations of order. Having failed to scrutinize the relationship between wealth accumulation and shifts in power relations in any direct way, the question of the relationship between capability distributions and the identity of the conflict initiator was ignored. Crucial questions such as ‘if faced with a fast growing challenger would a preventive military action by the dominant house appear to be a plausible course of action’ was left out of the discourse. Dike’s, Alagoa’s and Coockey’s otherwise brilliant historical analyses are dead silent on another question. Was the setting for the war created when trade (especially its peculiar turns in the 1860s) caused the power balance between Manilla Pepple House and Anna Pepple House to lead away from preponderance and toward parity? Without framing the issues this way and adequately answering them, our comprehension of the events of 1869, which created Opobo as the hegemon in the Eastern Niger Delta, is at best poor.

Our understanding of the 1869 war would be greatly aided if we examine it as a war that determined the system-level leadership. The politics of the canoe house system in the Eastern Niger Delta was characterized by alternating concentrations of power at the major house and the central (main) house levels. It is therefore not too far-fetched to suggest that capability shifts among major houses would be associated with war. Thus our explanation of the cause of the war would focus on the destabilizing and conflictual implications of a major house (challenger) catching up to a (relatively) declining leader (central house). We would start the journey to this new explanation of the cause of the 1869 war by adopting the capability distribution and power transition theory of international conflicts by A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler (1980). According to Organski and Kugler, a hierarchy of power determines and supports the international system. However, the power relations between the states are not permanent, and uneven growth in wealth and military capability ensured that shifts in international distribution of power undermine the balance of power, the rules of the international system and the division of values. “A growing disjuncture between a changing power distribution and the hierarchy of prestige produces a disequilibrium that, if uncorrected, results in crisis. In this way shifts in power relations favouring dissatisfied challenger states rather than the dominant nation create the necessary condition for transition wars.” (Geller 1996: 127) Put differently, the power transition theory suggests that systemic stability in the international system hinges on the dominance of a single power. It is argued that as the international system moves from unipolar

concentration of power and resources toward multi polarity (power diffusion), the weakening of the dominant state in the system will lead to conflicts and trigger violent confrontations among the states. In summary, Organski and Kugler (1980: 61-62) states that:

The mechanisms that make for major wars can simply be summed up. The fundamental problem that sets the whole system sliding almost irretrievable toward war is the difference in the rates of growth among great powers and, of particular importance, the differences in rates between the dominant nation and the challenger that permit the latter to overtake the former in power. It is the leapfrogging that destabilizes the system.... Finally, this destabilization and the ensuing conflict between giants act as a magnet, bringing into war all major powers in the system, dependent as they are on the order established by their leaders for what they already have, or for what they hope to gain in the future if they upset the existing order.

Power transition theory predicts the identity of conflict initiators. When power concentrations are very unequal, stronger states initiate fewer disputes than weaker ones, “perhaps due to their ability to secure their goals without militarized conflict.” But as capabilities or power conditions (i.e. differential rates of growth) converge, the stronger states are more likely to initiate the conflicts because of “pressures to exploit transient power advantages.” The challenger is more likely to launch an attack only if after it has surpassed the power of the dominant nation. (Geller 1996, 1992b: 1-16, 1992a: 269-284; Kugler and Organski 1989: 182-183; Kim and Morrow 1992: 896-922; Kim 1991: 833-850; Kim 1989: 255-273; Siverson 211-229; Rasler and Thompson 1994)

3. POWER ARRANGEMENT IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BONNY

We start the application of the power transition model to the Bonny civil war with a perspective on hierarchy in the canoe house system. There were three levels of hierarchy. At the lowest rung was the *wari*, canoe house; *wari* with its affiliates or satellite canoe houses was referred to as a group of houses. In such a group the parent house was known as the main house and others as sub-houses. In speaking and in writing Ijo people would refer to a group of houses as *wari* too. A group of houses or a collection of groups of houses constituted the *polo* or ward. The city was made up of wards. This was how the city, the capital of the kingdom and its subject-villages were organized. (Jones 1963: Chapters IV and VIII; Cookey 1974: Chapters I and II)

Power, status and prestige in the city were not distributed equally among the different *wari* or wards. There was a systemic stratification. The position of any canoe house and its influence in the system were determined by its relative power position, which was primarily anchored on wealth accumulation and economic

well-being. Thus, at the top of the hierarchy was usually the house with most wealth, men and military resources. Within the dominant canoe house group itself there was hierarchy, as in any other house group. There was the parent or main house and other sub-houses that were economically independent but remained politically subordinate to their main house. In the 1850s and 1860s the Manilla Pepple House was the dominant house in Bonny. It was in concert with the ruling royal house of William Dappa House. This coalition was the primary beneficiary of the allocation of state revenues (comey, subsidies and gifts from European merchants) and privileges emanating from the systemic status quo. This group was also the most powerful and the chief architect of the existing order.

It is germane to mention that in the time past the royal house alone was the dominant power – certainly in the eighteenth century and up to the time of death of King Opubo in 1830. For whoever was the king in the ‘golden past’ had a preponderance of power and wealth over any other single chief and most combinations of houses. The large advantage of wealth, which the king enjoyed, according to Cookey, appeared to have promoted peace and stability in the political order. But because of repercussion of changes in the rules of succession to the office of *amanyanabo* initiated by Perekule, the father of Opubo, the royal house was weakened. Perekule had in the eighteenth century subverted the procedure for the appointment of kings and was able to retain the right of succession within his canoe houses. This was to have effect in the political stability of Bonny. First, as a result of profits accumulated from the slave trade Perekule was able to create more canoe houses or expand the number of canoe houses under his control. This eventually led to the rise of very formidable and wealthy factions within the royal house which were often not under the control of their kings. Independent houses, which were too weak, were pressed to take sides with factions in the royal group. Since fortunes change with time, the descendants of the Perekule were not always the wealthiest in the royal group and therefore the powerful factions occasionally tended to overshadow the royal authority, or became the dominant group with the preponderance of men, materiel and money. (Cookey 1974: 17) From this viewpoint, it could be urged that in Bonny, as well as in Kalabari, as the political system moved from a high concentration of resources in the royal groups towards multi polarity, conflicts among leading canoe houses became increasingly frequent, due to the weakening of the office of *amanyanabo*, the principal defender of order.

Below the dominant group there were great powers. These were very wealthy and powerful houses whose capabilities were not at par with the dominant house at any given point in time, but had the potential to be the dominant power. The houses at this rung received less than their fair or proportional share of state revenues and available benefits from the status quo. In early 1860s Bonny, the houses of Anna Pepple, Captain Hart and Ada Allison were in this second group, though Anna Pepple was definitely ahead of the others. Power transition model suggests that it is among this group of great powers that eventual challengers to the position of the dominant power were to be found. Below the dominant and the great power groups

were the middle powers like Oko Epelle, Tom Brown and Cookey Gam Houses. Further down the feeding chain were the small powers, such as George Foobra, Fine Bone, Songo and Black.

The power of each house was critical in shaping out the way the political order functioned. Power was primarily derived from wealth. Therefore differences in growth of wealth precipitated by the trade in palm oil were important in understanding the changes that happened in the allocation and exchange of goods in the political order. For in the Bonny political order, as in any international order, systemic stratification was always acting in concert with the central dynamic of structural change (differences in growth of wealth) in the order. Contrary to the protestations of Cookey, the trade in palm oil, which was the primary economic activity of the city state, was a crucial factor in explaining the political instability of Bonny city-state in the 1860s. Jaja's spectacular success in the trade affected the relative power positions in the hierarchy, as we would soon discover.

Another critical determinant of peace and conflict was the degree of satisfaction with the distribution of influence and voice in the city-state. Peace in the political order was assured by the dominant coalition with the support of other houses which were satisfied with the way the kingdom was managed. The dominant coalition, as in any other Eastern Niger Delta states, acted only in combination with other houses, which were satisfied with the distribution of benefits determined by the prevailing order, established by the dominant power. It is pertinent at this juncture to state how combinations were formed in the nineteenth-century Bonny society. As Jones puts it, "combinations were the results either of the expansion of a single house or of the association together of a number of unrelated and formerly independent canoe houses." (Jones 1963: 57) This kind of alliance was fairly stable within the canoe house group. It was rare for a canoe house to break ranks with its own group to support another group. Where such a move occurred it were independent houses seeking to take side with a great power challenging a dominant power.

The third determinant (after relative power position and a degree of satisfaction) of the way the Bonny political order functioned was the existence of a dissatisfied group. This was the set of chiefs who believed that they were not receiving their fair share from the political order. Challengers, who are from this group, are often those who emerged as major competitors only after the emergence of the prevailing order, which determined the allocations of privileges. Chief Maduka, Alali, Ioli and Jaja as challengers came on the Bonny scene after such members of the Manilla Pepple House as Ibani, Ncheke and Oko Jumbo along with their house were the dominant players at different times. The challengers sought to create new places for themselves, but the primary beneficiaries were reluctant to give away part of their privileges to the challengers, even though the newly arriving chiefs had improved their fortunes. King Williams would not let Madu share in come revenues or play a major role in the negotiation for the treaty Bonny signed with Britain in 1837, though at the time the parvenu Maduka was the wealthiest merchant and a very

influential chief in the city-state. (Hargreaves 1987: 214) Oko Jumbo did not consult Jaja when he killed iguana, the national totem of Bonny, and declared that the monitor lizard “to be no longer Bonny Juju.” (Cookey 1974: 61) The Manilla House and its supporters did not listen to Iloli’s opinion that Anna Pepple House did not want William Dappa Pepple reinstated in 1861, even though Anna Pepple House had threatened to leave Bonny, if its wishes were ignored (Hargreaves 1987: 256). In 1869, the dominant power and its congeries of supporters once again ruled, against the expressed wishes of Jaja, that Oko Epelle House should transfer to George Dappa Pepple House (Jaja 1991: 1). Not surprising, therefore, that the immediate cause of the 1869 war was the wrongful treatment Jaja received from the Manilla Pepple led judicial committee over the Oko Epelle’s palaver (Jaja 1991: 1-2). As challengers asked for privileges and benefits, which they thought they deserved owing to their increasing level of wealth, conditions for conflict were created.

The power transition theory suggests that whenever dissatisfied group or challengers are impoverished or relatively weak they do not constitute a threat to the dominant house and other supporters of the dominant political order. But when a dissatisfied house achieves parity or surpasses the dominant house the conditions for conflicts are created. When Chief Maduka increased the wealth of the Anna Pepple House to rival that of the Manilla Pepple, the setting was created for challenges that led to the conflicts with the young ruler King William Dappa Pepple. Is it a surprise that there was no major challenge from Anna Pepple House, when Iloli ran the house to the ground? Vigorous challenges to the Manilla Pepple House dominance only came up again when the energetic Jaja vastly improved the wealth of the Anna Pepple House.

To sum up the discussion of power structure in nineteenth-century Bonny, one would say that as dissatisfied house(s) grew in wealth more rapidly than the dominant house, the setting for conflicts was created and the probability of war increased. The narrowing of the gap and near equalization generated structural incentives for the outbreak of conflicts. This was so because as the wealth and power gap closed, the leaders in the dominant group were agitated that the challenger would surpass them and even control them. This was the fear behind the statement: “If we allow this to go on, the whole of Bonny will soon belong to Anna Pepple.” Second, great powers increasingly demanded for bigger voice in the affairs of the city-state or sought to alter the status quo in their own favour. Herein lies the source of conflicts in the 1860s emerging brave new world of changing power relationships. The Bonny political system entered a destabilizing, conflictual and dangerous phase when the great powerhouse of Anna Pepple closed the gap or rival the leading Manilla Pepple House in wealth (power). War was precipitated when the dominant house recognizing the new power change resisted change in the rules in favour of Anna Pepple House, and Jaja the challenger launched an attack, when he thought that his house could win the war and change the rules in Bonny in its favour.

4. POWER TRANSITION AND THE 1869 BONNY WAR

The application of the power transition model to the 1869 Bonny war requires us to identify the dominant power and its challenger, and also to show that the challenger had cause to be dissatisfied with the prevailing political order. In the late 1850s and early 1860s the Manilla Pepple House was the dominant power in Bonny. The royal house represented by William was economically weak. The wealth of the monarchy had been destroyed in the 1855 war, and while he was in exile his business operations had gone into disrepair. William, before and after his deportation, was also weak politically, as he did not enjoy wide recognition of his authority. Anna Pepple House was in debts and had been marginalised because of its long history of opposition to the monarchy. One instance of the marginalisation was the distribution of comey. Hargreaves in her study revealed that Anna Pepple did not receive any comey dues between 1837 and 1854, though Manilla Pepple got something (Hargreaves 1987: 214). Anna Pepple House had another cause to be dissatisfied with the hierarchy of prestige in Bonny. In April 1837, William with the backing of British military might forced a meeting to ratify the treaty of 1836 and the 1837 amendments to enable ship captains to trade within seven days of arrival whether or not they had paid comey. Maduka, the leader of the Anna Pepple House at the time, did not want to attend the meeting, because he felt that the provisions of the treaties undermined Bonny's sovereignty. But he was forced to come to the meeting by the British naval squadron equipped with gunboats. At the meeting, in front of all Bonny chiefs and supercargoes, he was denounced for usurping the power of the king. The leader of the squad, Commander Craigie, had this to say after the meeting: "Anna Pepple, though having at first, assumed a haughty and menacing carriage now seemed to fall before just accusations, and signed without hesitation the separate and additional articles relating expressly to him, in the treaty."¹¹ The marginalisation of Anna Pepple House or the dominance of the political scene by the Manilla Pepple/royal house did not change much at Jaja's time. On Easter day 1867, the newly converted Manilla House leader, Oko-Jumbo, and his Christian colleagues declared that the iguana was no longer the totemistic deity of Bonny. Then in a further display of power exuberance, on June 20, Oko-Jumbo and his cohorts abolished the practice of killing twins at birth in Bonny. These were all decisions that were taken by the politically dominant power without the consent of Jaja (Cookey 1974: 61). From Maduka, Alali and Ioli to Jaja, as hard as they tried, the Anna Pepple House did not gain the political supremacy it needed at Bonny. The series of marginalisation became commingled with a widening disjuncture between wealth distribution and the hierarchy of power in the 1860s. In the mid-1860s, political dominance was

¹¹ F. O. 2/1 Inc. 2 in No. 1, Craigie to Campbell, River Bonny, 13th April 1837, Sloop Scout quoted in Hargreaves (1987: 202).

separated from economic superiority. With the revival of the Anna Pepple house under the able leadership of Jaja, the Manilla Pepple (or the combination of Manila Pepple and royal house) no longer had a preponderance of economic and military capabilities from 1864 onwards, as it had had at Iloli's time when Anna Pepple House was in near bankruptcy. Economic power shift was in favour of members of Anna Pepple House, but "they realised that their opposition to both the Pepple monarchy and the *Ibaniwari* [Manilla Pepple] had precluded them from obtaining consent to lead Bonny politically." (Hargreaves 1987: 292)

Having settled matters relating to the existence of a dominant player and dissatisfied challenger, the next order of work in explaining the cause of the 1869 war is to show two things. First, the challenger (Anna Pepple House) had achieved parity or had overtaken dominant Manilla Pepple House in economic capabilities in the immediate years leading to the war. Second, relate the initiation of the war to the growth of the challenger's economic and military capability – that is, associate the initiation of the war to the challenger achieving parity or surpassing the dominant power. The discussion of the war in the previous pages has already shown that it was the Anna Pepple House that initiated the war by Jaja's invitation to Manilla Pepple House to fight on Sunday, September 12th, 1869. So all there is to be done now is to show if Anna Pepple came from behind to overtake Manilla Pepple in economic and military capabilities. This is necessary because the power transition model predicts that the challenger is more likely to initiate a conflict only if it has surpassed the power of the dominant player. In order not to get entrapped in the debate about whether wars are triggered when there is power parity or when a dissatisfied challenger overtakes a dominant power, we should reiterate the important focus of this paper. The accent of the paper is on the uneven growth in wealth and military capability, which undermined the balance of power in Bonny. The simple point is that capability shifts among the major houses precipitated the 1869 war, which caused system-level leadership changes in the Eastern Delta. The quality of the data available would not permit a more precise analysis, or allow us to go beyond this. There are no direct economic data on the income, wealth and military arsenal of the key players in 1860s Bonny politics. "Regarding the volume of business of the major houses, there are no extant records on these matters in the public archives in England and Nigeria."¹²

However, there are several indicative data to show that changes in the economic fortunes – and the attendant overtaking of the Manilla Pepple House by the Anna Pepple House – occurred between 1863 and 1869. An analysis of the signatories of conventions and treaties in the period bears this assertion out. The use of signatories

¹² Personal communications with Dr. Waibinte Wariboko (University of West Indies, Jamaica) on September 12, 1997. Professor Lisa Aronson (Skidmore College, New York) who has also worked on Bonny history expressed the same view on July 14, 1997. See also Wariboko (1984: 14-15). I also searched the records, published and unpublished academic work without coming up with any information on personal and national incomes.

of treaties and conventions is not new to Niger Delta historians and social anthropologists. Jones (1963: 120) used this method to gauge the “decline in the position and authority of the monarch in king William Dapper Pepple’s reign,” and stated that, as indeed Hargreaves (1987: 205), that treaties listed chiefs in order of political importance.

Table 1. Capability Index of Nineteenth Century Bonny

Dates	Names of Manilla Pepple House Treaty Signatories	Names of Anna Pepple House Treaty Signatories
1837 – 1850	Manilla Pepple and Will Pepple	Anna Pepple and Teriyon
1854 – 1859	Manilla, Banigo and Jack Wilson	Anna, Bonn Face
1866 – 1870	Manilla, Long John, Oko-Jumbo, Squiss-Banigo, and Fine Country	Anna, Uranta, Worgu Dappa, Bonny Face, Oko-Epelle and Strong Face

Note: Compiled from Tables of Conventions and Treaties: Jones (1963: 103-5).

Manilla Pepple was the leading, dominant house until Anna Pepple overtook it in the 1860s (table 1). Comments of contemporaries support this assertion. In 1858 Consul Hutchinson considered Manilla Pepple House as the “most extensive and powerful house” in Bonny (Hargreaves 1987: 251; Jones 1963: 126; Cookey 1974: 47). But in 1864, Jaja, the leader of Anna Pepple, was described by Consul Burton, the successor of Hutchinson, as the most “influential and the greatest trader in the area with the turnover of £50,000 sterling per annum.”¹³ Barely a year after the enterprising Jaja took over the management of the Anna Pepple House, parity of power between itself and Manilla Pepple had been achieved. Burton observed in 1864 that, “two great houses [Anna Pepple and Manilla Pepple] of slave chiefs now contend for superiority and they are so equally balanced that the present puppet King remains in position. In case of a fight each side could raise 2,500 musketeers, they had abundance of ammunition, ships, swivels and carronades...”¹⁴

Differences in economic growth and perhaps superior management style propelled Anna Pepple House ahead of Manilla by 1866 (Hargreaves 1987: 47, 56, 68, 71-72). With profit accumulated from the transatlantic trade, Jaja was able to absorb independent houses by paying off the debts at a time when the Bonny economy was in recession. He was so successful in this venture that at the time he left Bonny about 50% of Bonny inhabitants went away with the Anna Pepple House (Hargreaves 1987: 308, 65). Manilla Pepple House's approach to expansion

¹³ Burton to Russell, 8 August 1864. F. O. 2/45. Confidential.

¹⁴ Burton’s letter in F. O. 84/1221, quoted in Jones (1963: 128).

(segmentation) is said to have precipitated a weakening process, as the house had to forgo the contribution of these sub-houses to its house fund. While there was political advantage (example, increasing its support and vote in the chiefs' council) of separating a successful unit, the houses created were economically independent with the main house losing their direct contribution to its wealth. "The formation of these houses dissipated the wealth of Manilla Pepple House so much that, by the late nineteenth century, it had ceased to be one of the leading economic houses and had, in fact, amassed debt (Hargreaves 1987: 56 (for quote), 74-75).

When we examine Anna Pepple House overtaking of the Manilla Pepple House against the background of economic recession prevalent in Bonny in the 1860s, we get a sense of the spectacular achievement of Jaja's leadership and the growth differential between Anna Pepple House and the other canoe houses.¹⁵ Between 1854 and 1869, Bonny citizens were in a situation every businessman dreads: the prices paid for their exports were going downhill while the prices they were paying to their suppliers were trending up. The price of oil in London was £50 in the period 1854-1856 per ton, whilst in 1864 the price had plummeted to £32 per ton. In the same period, the price the Bonny people obtained from European merchants changed from £19 to £12-13 per ton (Hargreaves 1987: 268-269). This problem was further compounded by the fall in the volume of oil supplied to Bonny by the interior producers, the rising cost of goods and the loss of the oil markets. Brass market was lost because of wars between the Ibos; the people of Ohambele stopped trade because of the deposition of William Pepple. In 1864 an employee of John Holt (a British trading firm in Bonny at the time) remarked that the combination of rising cost of goods and falling commodity prices was "enough to drive a fellow mad." (Hargreaves 1987: 269) To worsen matters, the supply of staple food items from their primary market in Okrika was disrupted because of the outbreak of hostilities between Kalabari and Okrika. The war between these two states, which had started in 1859, erupted again in 1865. Again in 1867 fighting erupted between Kalabari on one hand, and Okrika and Brass on the other hand, over access to the markets in Obiatusu. Bonny obliged to assist her allies and hoping to gain access to new markets jumped into the affray against Kalabari. This war diverted so much resources that it was reported that Bonny trade had decreased by over 60% (Hargreaves 1987: 282). The trade depression in Bonny lasted for over 4 years, from 1862 to 1866 (Hargreaves 1987: 286). In fact, in the whole of the 1860s in the Bights of Benin and Biafra there were only one good year of economic buoyancy, viz. 1867-68. Kannan Nair (1973: 425-433) stated that the decade of the 1860s was one of "over-extension by the trading companies, falling prices in England, rising prices in the Oil Rivers, lower profit margins, 'cut-throat' competition for non-expanding trade, determination to open new markets, tightening of credit facilities, clashes of interest due to attempts of foreclosure, and similar trends."

¹⁵ It is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate why one house did better than another during the period of legitimate commerce.

In sum, the recession occasioned by the loss of markets, dwindling profit margins and wars not only raised the level of political tension, but also intensified the political rivalry between the Bonny houses. The small houses which were relatively more affected by the economic crisis were involved in skirmishes with each other, thus providing an opportunity for Anna Pepple and Manilla Pepple houses to further their economic and political goals (Hargreaves 1987: 284; Hopkins 1973: 148). Anna Pepple house under Jaja's leadership wasted no time in exploiting such an opportunity. Anna Pepple absorbed small independent houses that had fallen into debt. Manilla Pepple house followed Anna's lead. To stem the absorption and subjugation of the smaller houses by the large and powerful houses, an agreement was signed in January 1869, in which these smaller houses agreed to desist from selling themselves to either Manilla Pepple or Anna Pepple (Alagoa and Fombo 1972: 111-112). In the scramble to accumulate wealth by mergers and acquisitions and by curbing competition, Jaja succeeded well as is revealed by the number of houses he signed on. We cautiously infer that since Jaja signed up more houses than Oko-Jumbo, Anna Pepple house fared better than Manilla Pepple in the midst of the economic recession. "Such a remarkable extension of influence is difficult to explain except in terms of a rush by the weaker canoe-houses to seek the protection of the stronger and to invest, as it were, in a corporation which showed its management to be exceptionally sound." (Cookey 1974: 53)

A few comments about the data presented in the table are in order. Even though there was parity in the 1837-50 period, a reading of the history of the period reveals that the Anna Pepple House, under the leadership of Maduka (and Alali), was economically ahead of the Manilla Pepple. But it was certainly not the dominant power as the combination of Manilla Pepple, the royal house and British support clearly put Maduka's men in the position of challengers of the Bonny political order. The rich and most important men (for example, George Goodhead, King Halliday and Jack Brown) in the city-state hated him. The British also did not like him, and "it was necessary for warships to come from time to time to make sure that he remained loyal in his allegiance." (Hargreaves 1987: 207, 210) Thus, even though our data suggest parity in reality there was preponderance of capabilities on the side of the Manilla Pepple/royal houses.

Another comment is also in order for the 1866-1870 period. If we removed Oko-Epelle, who contested Jaja's claim that his house was part of Anna Pepple House, we do not have a case of overtaking but parity. In general, one must be very careful in interpreting the table. For the number of signatories was also dependent on how each house decided to grow rather than on the actual growth of wealth or capabilities. Manilla Pepple generally expanded by creating new houses (segmentation), while Anna Pepple expanded by absorbing independent segments (incorporation) or creation of sub-units, which were not given independent status. Under this circumstance, Anna Pepple will tend to have a smaller number of chiefs signing treaties (Hargreaves 1987: 47-48, 71; Alagoa and Fombo 1972: 53). Be that as it may, we must also recognize that Anna Pepple achieved dominance in the

1860s in spite of the different styles of house expansion, making its achievement spectacular and a good pointer to its increased economic and political capabilities.

5. CONCLUSION

The object of the preceding pages has been to examine the 1869 Bonny war and to relate its outbreak to changes in economic and military capabilities of the two leading Bonny canoe houses. First, the Bonny political system was hierarchically organized. Leaders recognized their influence in the city-state as based on power distribution among canoe houses. These leaders and their canoe houses were in constant competition over scarce resources – wealth and people. Second, at the top of the hierarchical pyramid was at one time or the other the royal house, the royal house cum Manilla Pepple House, or the Manilla Pepple House. Below the Manilla Pepple House/monarchy combination were great powers like Anna Pepple House, Captain Hart House and Ada Allison House, which did not have the resources to match one on one the power of the dominant group. Third, the leaders of Anna Pepple House, which was the number-two house in the hierarchy, were not satisfied with the way the Bonny political order functioned and with the leadership of the dominant group. Maduka, Alali, Iloli and Jaja did not believe they and their canoe house were receiving their fair due from the Bonny political order. Because of this dissatisfaction, Anna Pepple House became the challenger of the Bonny political order. Finally, the conditions for conflict were created when the challenger, Anna Pepple, caught up and overtook the dominant canoe house combination, Manilla Pepple/monarchy. This assertion derived from two premises. The challenger grew at faster rates than the dominant house. The second premise is the connection between distribution of power (capabilities) and the presence of conflict or stability in the political system. The argument is that political orders are stable (meaning major, systemic wars are absent) when actors in support of the status quo have a massive power preponderance. In political orders, where systemic power concentration is increasing, conflicts are minimized among the strongest of the actors. But where systemic-level capabilities are diffusing, the probability of war or major conflict is higher. The Bonny political system was stable (in the sense of the absence of a transition war) as long as the dominant house and its followers had a large power advantage over any other house or combination of houses dissatisfied with the distribution of privileges in the system. The necessary, but not the sufficient, condition was created for a major conflict when Anna Pepple House's power overtook that of the dominant Manilla Pepple House between 1866 and 1869. This finding provides a further insight into our understanding of the events of September 1869, because it relates the timing of the war initiation by Jaja to power (wealth) overtaking.

The preceding analysis has unified the theories (and their amendations) of three historians, Dike, Alagoa and Cooley – by weaving their seemingly disparate

explanations into a coherent whole. Dike was right when he related the origin of the war to a dissatisfied group demanding for political power. Obviously we have seen that there was dissatisfaction in the Bonny kingdom because of growing disjuncture between economic capabilities and privileges of the political order. Dike was wrong when he identified the dissatisfied group as wealthy ex-slaves. The war was not between slaves and freeborn, but between a dominant power (Manilla Pepple House) determined to shut out from political supremacy an economically powerful challenger (Anna Pepple House). Alagoa posited that the war was a reflection of the failure of the Eastern Delta canoe system to work out an acceptable procedure for overall political leadership. The power transition literature has shown that political orders characterized by systemic stratification have, in general and historically, not been able to evolve an 'acceptable procedure' for handling systemic leadership changes, when hegemonic power concentration is undermined by differential rates in growth of capabilities. The primary adjustment mechanism, when there is disjuncture between a changing systemic power distribution and hierarchy of prestige, has been war (Geller 1992a: 270). Power relations among the canoe houses, as among nation states, were not permanent, and the differential rates of economic growth ensured that the systemic distribution of power shifted and undermined the foundations of order. This shift occurred in the 1860s with the rise and spectacular economic success of Jaja.

Cookey's explanation is closest to the power transition theory, but it differs from it in many crucial respects. He attributed the war to weakening of the central power in Bonny. But he failed to explore the relationship between concentration of economic resources in the hands of a dominant leader and the maintenance of stability in a political order. The war might still have been prevented if another political power acting alone or in combination with the monarchy had a preponderance of economic and military capabilities. The 1869 war might have been avoided if economic growth rates were even between the dominant power (Manilla Pepple House) and the challenger (Anna Pepple House). But for its particularistic attachment to the Bonny polity fixed at a particular time. Cookey's explanation would have become a contribution to the theory of war.

The above analysis, based on the power transition model, gives an answer to the question of what caused the 1869 war. That is, difference in economic growth rates caused the power balance in Bonny to lead away from preponderance of capabilities towards parity, multi polarity and overtaking, which were conditions more favourable to the outbreak of systemic war. The implications are that the relationship between difference in economic growth rate and the movement away from power preponderance transcends the Bonny political order and is required by the very nature of that phenomenon that we call hierarchical political order.

* I wish to thank Professor Toyin Falola, Dr. Susan Hargreaves and Professor Jacob Ade Ajayi for their criticism and advice. None of them is responsible for any remaining error in this paper.

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