

Little Popo: The sociopolitical and economic erosion of a port town

Adam J. Ondo

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Introduction

Located between Lake Gbaga to the west and the Mono River to the east, the Popo kingdom flourished for many centuries in what is now Togo. The Peda people, who were renamed the Popo by the Portuguese in the 1500s, lived in this coastal region with the Ewe, Fon, and Guin as their neighbors.¹ The land has always been flat, sandy, and devoid of trees, and populated with “an incredible number of rats.”² Near the western border of the kingdom lies Little Popo, a community of towns settled along a lagoon (marked in Fig. 1). Aneho is the primary port of Little Popo. It has one of the worst harbors in Western Africa, because the sea beats “with such violence against the shore, that during the greater part of the year neither boats nor canoes dare approach it.”³ Over time, this process has eroded away the shoreline.

The importance and economic prowess of Little Popo grew due to the rise of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, but, like the shoreline, it has since been eroded away due to the locals’ failure to capitalize on “legitimate commerce” and the adverse consequences of the policies of the British Royal Navy. Originally used as a slave port by the Portuguese, the Royal African Company had secured a foothold in Little Popo by the 1680s, and purchased local captives to supplement its slave cargos. The Popo people repelled multiple attacks from neighboring kingdoms during this time, giving Little Popo more clout in the eyes of traders. Local politics, war, and economic factors caused many factories to appear and disappear during the 18th century, with slave-trading activity peaking in the 1790s, when the slave trade reached its zenith. The economic growth that Little Popo experienced during this time slowed after 1808, when Great Britain abolished the slave trade. The community lost its significance as a port after the Germans colonized it in 1885.

Little Popo's decline occurred because when "legitimate commerce" started to become the dominant form of trade in West Africa, the merchants of Little Popo continued to trade slaves, as it provided quick gains and did not require risky investments like the palm oil trade did. Self-interested African elite with high time preferences and British anti-slavery policies allowed for this to continue. This made it harder to enter the market and the warfare associated with slavery made large scale palm produce operations impractical. Little Popo met the same fate as many smaller port towns in West Africa, which prospered from the illegal slave trade and then failed to shift their economies when trade patterns changed. The history of this lagoon port provides insight into the effects of the prohibition of slave trade on small West African ports.

The Rise of Little Popo

The harbor of Little Popo is five leagues west of that of Great Popo, also called Grand Popo, which was "built on island formed by creeks and marshes." The Portuguese fittingly called it *Terra Annegada*, "the Drowned Land."⁴ The Popo kingdom included Little Popo, Great Popo, and the town of Aghwey, aka Agoue. To the west of the Popoes' territory was Togoville, on Lake Togo, and Lome, located on the Togo-Ghana border. These westerners were Ewe people from the Volta region and Ashanti refugees from Accra. To the east of the Popoes was the Dahomey kingdom, which expanded to seize control of the important slave ports of Whydah and Allada in the 1720s. Surrounded by these powerful nations, the people of Little Popo used their martial abilities to fend off advances from both directions, using the prisoners of war they took as a means of accumulating capital.

The British adventurer Archibald Dalziel reported in 1793 that Little Popo is "a small, but very warlike kingdom, the remains of the Accras, who were driven out of their own territories on the Gold Coast, by the Aquamboes, in 1680."⁵ More refugees flooded in from the east four

decades later, after Dahomey captured the city of Allada in 1724 and Whydah in 1727. The King of Allada had hired a band of Little Popo-based warriors to attack his enemies in 1692, but these mercenaries disbanded shortly afterwards, following the death of their leader at a fight at the coastal village of Coto.⁶ At Whydah, those who were not slaughtered, sold as slaves, or taken in as vassals, fled west to take refuge among their neighbors, the Popoes. King Trudo of Dahomey pursued the refugees, causing many of them to drown in the intersecting rivers that marked the entrance to the “marshy country” that the Popoes called home.⁷ Dalzel reported that, “The King, and many of his train, by the help of canoes, got safe to the islands near Popo; but numbers, who could not obtain that conveyance, were, in their hurry, drowned in attempting to swim over to them.”⁸ Though Trudo was persistent, Little Popo, with its musket wielding armies and mobile “artillery mounted canoes,” managed to fend off the Dahomey invasion.⁹

The attacks did not stop with the repulse of this Dahomian army, though. “An Akwamu army, in 100 canoes,” arrived at the mouth of the Volta in November 1731 and set up a war camp. After raiding numerous coastal villages, they pillaged Little Popo in 1733, but retreated after the death of their leader, Amu.¹⁰ By 1743, the refugees from Whydah had enlarged their operations and had left Little Popo, planning to reclaim control of Whydah. The Popoes, and their allies, decided to throw their support behind them, allowing them to retake the city for a while, but Dahomey eventually won the power struggle.¹¹

This warlike state of affairs existed before the Transatlantic Slave Trade took off in West Africa, but after Europeans arrived and wars became a means to procure slaves that could be converted into foreign goods, the warring factions relied more and more on imported arms to defeat their enemies. The inhabitants of Little Popo took advantage of these military advances

and avoided enemy takeover; however, their business exploits are what allowed them to gain the powerful military they used to resist incorporation into inland kingdoms.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade

“The natives live on plunder and on the slave trade. Their slave trade is not, however, very considerable, frequently require[ing] a residence of some months to complete a cargo.”¹²

American cartographer John Payne’s *Universal Geography* description of Little Popo reveals that it was not the principal place of slave purchase in the area, but it did prosper primarily due to the slave trade. The guns, alcohol, and money acquired through this trade fundamentally supported the political sovereignty that Little Popo enjoyed throughout this tumultuous period; the guns provided the inventory of slaves Little Popo traders possessed, so they can be called the most important import.

According to Professor Joseph E. Inikori, an authority on the Transatlantic Slave Trade, “small slaving-states along the coast... were great buyers of firearms, as they did not have larger armies needed for raids.”¹³ This is why full scale wars were often used as a means to obtain slaves to trade for more guns. German botanist Paul Erdman Isert asserted that the Popoes “knew better how to use firearms than the stupid Krepis,” who were inland Ewe people. This helps explain why such a small community became as powerful as Little Popo was. In 1702, the Dutch merchant Willem Bosman wrote that Little Popo was sometimes able to supply 200 slaves in three days’ time. He also noted that this wasn’t always the case, as it depended on when the last war had occurred. Also, not all slaves were traded. Those who visited Glidji, the inland capital of Little Popo located on the northern shore of the lagoon, observed slaves used in the fields, with the “unworthy” ones being sold to European traders in most situations.¹⁴ Despite the occasional dearth of slaves, Little Popo was generally busy during the slave trade period.

Although the Portuguese were the first Europeans to trade for slaves in Little Popo, stopping there intermittingly in the 1600s, the Dutch and British were responsible for its sharp expansion. Correspondences between Royal African Company officials provide great insight into the volume of the slave trade in Little Popo between 1680 and 1731. The Company's records reveal the volatility of the market at Little Popo and the disorganization of the European merchants.

In 1683, the RAC established itself as a dominant trading partner in Little Popo. On June 24, 1683, Company agent John Winder reported from Whydah that Captain Petly Wyborne went to Abree (another name for Little Popo) and had been buying slaves for 6 weeks for Captain Booth. "I understand itt is a good place for slaves, and doe know that Wyborne intends to settle a Whiteman there."¹⁵ Because Booth was an interloper who did not work for the Company, Winder suggests his superiors order Wyborne "hoyst a flagg there for the Royall Company" in order to secure this new trade.¹⁶ Two days later, Capt. Wyborne sent a letter from Little Popo admitting that he has been disloyal for refusing to go to Cabo Corso as ordered, but thereafter promised, "In what I can be serviceable to the Company here, I will and doe itt faithfully. He then warns his bosses that "the Dutch are setleing a factory att Popoe, which they have had formerly," and that "the chiefe people have obliged themselves to mee."¹⁷ Wyborne's RAC trading post did not last long, though, due to competition with the Dutch.

On May 10, 1687, RAC agent John Carter toured Little Popo with Mounsieur John Poeselwitt of the Brandenburg Gold Coast factory and met with Monsieur Couerden, the manager of the French factory at Whydah. The group then went to see Ofori, the King of Accra before Akwamu forced him out in 1680, at his house in Gliji. Ofori worked for the Dutch, though, and kept taking down the Company flag and putting the Dutch flag back up as Carter

was trying to make a deal with him that would once again grant the RAC access to Little Popo's slave market. Approximately two miles to the west was a settlement run by General of the Accras, Sofferry Pickaninnee. The group went and spoke to Pickaninne and, in return for a fetish, a talisman or similar object highly valued by Africans, he agreed to trade exclusively with the Royal African Company and fly their flag.¹⁸ Little Popo thus continued to supply slaves, just not in large enough quantities to satiate agent Joseph Blyth. On August 7, 1687, while on board Captain Thompson's *George Sloop*, Blyth picked up fifty slaves at Little Popo and "found [he] could purchase noe more."¹⁹ The RAC continued to do business with the Popoes until it ended its slaving business in 1731.

The decline of the Royal African Company stemmed in part from its poorly organized factory system. Correspondence between Charles Guyon, the Company manager of the Little Popo Factory, and his superiors at Cabo Corso Castle in Ghana illustrates this shortcoming. In 1727, Guyon was lacking trading supplies and was having his pay docked, along with every other RAC trader. His employers told him that they would have sent him supplies sooner "had there been any Vessels proper for Conveying them," but they had only just recently acquired a new long boat. They also informed him that the Company had reduced his pay to £60 per annum, but nonetheless entreated him to "strenuously exert [him]self for enlarging the Trade of that place." The letter ends with a request that he make an inventory of his goods for September. On November 20, 1727, Guyon responded that he had received "the three inventories inclosed" in the previous package, but that he did not have one sheet of account paper in the factory and asked them to send some over. He listed the "goods wanting here" as cowries, guns, gun powder, and different types of cloth that was used as currency. The guns, though always in high demand, were especially crucial in 1727, since Dahomey was on the offensive. On December 2nd, Guyon

was ordered to report to Mr. Duport, Chief of the Whydah factory, and request supplies from him in the future. In February 1728, Guyon reported that he had not been able to keep a tally of the Company's slaves, but the Gold Taker at Cabo Corso should have. The Company's factory at Little Popo ceased operations shortly after.²⁰ The people of Little Popo continued to obtain even more guns and sold even more slaves, however, since the departure of the RAC opened up their market to new European trading partners.

The expansion of military and slavery activity during the late 1720s and early 1730s can be explained by the aggression of the Akwamu and Dahomian armies mentioned above. The skirmishes and struggles that continued in the late 1730s and early 1740s spurred trade with Little Popo's new trading partner, the French. The French *Compagnie du Sénégal* launched scores of slave gathering voyages to Little Popo between 1731 and 1769. In 1739 and 1740, 11 vessels used Little Popo as their principal port for gathering slaves. On his 1739 voyage, Captain Pierre Ozanne picked up 375 slaves. In the same year, Captain Julien Auffray du Gué Lambert bought 415 slaves from African traders. Although both captains used a couple of other stops along the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin to fill their cargo holds, the majority of slaves came from Little Popo. These examples highlight the dimensions of Little Popo's trade during this period, which continued to grow even after the RAC was out of the picture.²¹

In 1772, a Danish lodge for slave trading was established, but after the Danes got involved in tribal politics and lost, by supporting a weaker, more malleable family over a stronger clan, it was shut down in 1790. Erdmann, in 1788, witnessed a conversation between the chief of Little Popo and Danish traders. "[The chief] had to have still more kegs of gunpowder and some casks of brandy," before the merchants could return to their ship according to how his charm worked. After sleeping on it, however, he released them from the "power" of his fetish,

the magical talisman that conveyed his powers and kept them off of the beach.²² Even in the late 1700s, the purchase of firearms by residents of Little Popo was necessary if the local African traders were going to procure more slaves to trade for European goods, which is why guns and gunpowder were so desperately sought after.

In 1789, while Danish influence was waning, agents working for the firm Messrs Miles and Weuves of London established a new lodge in Little Popo. In 1792, a Dutch and another British lodge were established. Thomas Miles and Jerome Bernard Weuves, a former RAC agent, ran the most efficient outfit, supplying their traders regularly and continuously loading their ships with slaves.²³ John Searle, manager of the Little Popo Factory owned by Miles and Weuves, sent a letter to Miles on February 1, 1794, stating, “I shall therefore as long as I have Liquor, Powder, and Guns be able to put a few even without Cloth, though at the same time long Cloth if to be procured would be of great Service, as it would enable me very soon to purchase all the slaves that came.”²⁴ In response, Miles sent 24 excellent and 23 shoddy guns to Little Popo for Searle to sell. By 1796, after a war between Dahomey and Grand Popo against Little Popo, only the two British lodges survived.²⁵ The slave trade officially ended the following decade.

Professor Inikori has argued that Little Popo was “one of the most important slave ports beyond the reach of Dahomey,” not because the volume of traffic was enormous but because it was one of the most prominent places for ships to supplement partial cargos that had been picked up elsewhere.²⁶ The guns and gunpowder the Popoes got in return allowed for their towns to become politically powerful and contributed to their economic success, since slaves were chiefly acquired via wars and raids. By the late 1700s, local merchants were even building European-style houses.²⁷ The height of the Little Popo’s success corresponded with the height of the slave

trade. It is thus understandable why local merchants would want the slave trade to continue, even after the British banned it in 1808.

Legitimate Commerce & Illegal Slavery

On March 2, 1807, the United States Congress passed an act prohibiting “the importation of Slaves into any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States.” England followed suit 23 days later, enacting the “Act for the Abolition of Slavery.” However, this was not enforced until the following year, when the Royal Navy’s West African Squadron was dispatched to capture illegal slavers and release any slaves onboard.²⁸

The main scope of British policy up until 1820 was to stop the slave trade in British territories, so “legitimate commerce” – trade in any good other than slaves – flourished in those places. The British policy of promoting “legitimate commerce” issued in reforms in those parts of West Africa, allowing for chiefs to start plantations in the Bight of Benin, women to sell palm kernels at markets in the Bight of Biafra, and, after the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, for former slaves to enter the job market in British territories (264).²⁹ Palm produce and ground nuts were the major exports from West Africa during this period. The first British oil merchants in Little Popo arrived in the 1820s.³⁰ Despite the shift in most coastal kingdoms’ economies, the oil and slave trade coexisted well into the 1860s in Dahomey. British crackdowns on the now illegal slave trade forced many traders to turn to the west of Dahomey, though, and smuggle slaves through Little Popo, whose inhabitants were more than happy to continue their profitable trade.

Miles and Weuves were gone by 1820, but Brazilian and Spanish traders stepped in to continue the slave trading. Brazilian trader Francisco Felix de Souza established “a network of factories from Little Popo to Lagos” and helped Ghezo seize the throne of Dahomey in 1818. He supplied Ghezo with imported European goods, as he was an experienced trader. By bribing

Dahomian authorities, who had run de Souza out of Whydah in 1818, Ghezo helped de Souza restore his rule from a Portuguese fort in Whydah, with his son Isidrio becoming his agent in Little Popo. Spanish slavers also used Little Popo as a landing. In 1828, the *Emprendador*, a brigantine commanded by Captain Ramon Clavell, was captured by the British after leaving Little Popo.³¹ In 1820, the British shut down the Gold Coast slave trade by increasing the amount of Royal Navy patrols, so Akan and Voltaic slaves were transported from Accra to Little Popo, Agoue, and Grand Popo for export. The clandestine trade grew, increasing the profits and influence of these ports, much to de Souza's delight.³²

Local politics helped establish the illegal slave trade as the main economic focus of Little Popo. The 1821 civil war between Akuete Zanli and his opponents, another powerful merchant family, is arguably the most important event in Little Popo's history. Zanli was a wealthy trader who adopted the name George Lawson, after a British captain who sailed for Weuvers in the 1790s, when he dealt with Europeans. After emerging victorious in the war he waged against his opponents, he and his family exerted their influence over Little Popo's future for more than a century, doing their best to profit at their community's expense.³³ De Souza, whose wife was the daughter of Akue, a local chief, also "entertained good relations with George Lawson, the de facto ruler of Little Popo."³⁴ Lawson, Ghezo, and Akue allowed the illegal slave trade to blossom during their reign.

The help that the British Parliament unintentionally gave to slave traders at Little Popo was quite considerable and probably just as instrumental in the continuation of the slave trade as local politics was. The 1839 Equipment Act gave British authorities the right to detain Portuguese and Spanish vessels equipped for the transportation of slaves found in West African waters, not just along the Gold Coast. Because Whydah was too well monitored to be a viable

slave port, traders switched their activities “to less-known places.”³⁵ On April 4, 1840, the H.M.S *Skipjack* captured *The Ulysses* off of the coast of Little Popo; she was on her 8th voyage and had previously eluded numerous men-of-war. Fourteen of the sixteen crew members had been captains of slavers and their records show that they had assembled a cargo of 556 slaves from Popo, Sargos, Whydah, and Bodgerry.³⁶ In 1851, British naval authorities stopped another slaver that had acquired slaves at Little Popo. These captures provide a glimpse of the illegal slave trade in Little Popo, but the true magnitude will never be known, as many slavers were never captured. Ironically, some vessels wishing to engage in “legitimate commerce” were harassed by anti-slaving patrols, hurting legal trade. The brig, the *Pepeta*, had filled 70 of its 500 berths at Little Popo, before running to Whydah and “stealing along the shore as close as possible,” in order to slip past the H.M.S *Flying Fish*.³⁷ William A. Hickling, captain of the New Orleans-based *Octavia*, wrote to the House of Commons on November 16, 1839 that the H.M.S *Acorn* bore down on him and threatened to “make a prize” of him because he looked suspicious, even though all he was carrying was rum, tobacco, and dry goods worth \$4,000 to Little Popo. The officers said the casks were the wrong size on the American products, but none of the British merchant vessels were harassed while they were loading up on palm oil according to Hickling.³⁸ Hickling complained further, stating, “Even in the West Indies we are examined, and in a number of cases insulted, by those overbearing men-of-war.”³⁹ These arrests did not have enough of an impact to stop the slave trade and may have deterred many legitimate vessels from doing business in Little Popo. In any case, Little Popo’s illegal dealings persisted.

After the larger slave ports were closed by the British, the Lawsons managed the slave trade of Little Popo by signing agreements with traders other than de Souza. Francisco dos Santos, a Brazilian trader, operated out of Aghwey and Little Popo in the mid-1840s. The *Pepito*,

a Spanish vessel, had 400 of dos Santos' slaves onboard when it embarked on its voyage from Aghwey. He came to know the Lawsons quite well. Joaqui d'Almeida, a liberated Brazilian slave, turned Little Popo's neighbor, Aghwey, into his own exclusive "slave-port" after de Souza died in 1849. Like de Souza, he dealt with the Lawsons, purchasing slaves in Little Popo to be shipped out of Aghwey to Cuba and Brazil. Domingo Mustich, a Spaniard, also allegedly founded a slave factory in Little Popo in 1847. He worked for a decade there on behalf of the Barcelona firm Vidal.⁴⁰ George Lawson Senior continued to export slaves until 1850. George Lawson Junior, by contrast, began to pursue legitimate trade in the mid-1840s. However, a lack of cowries, canoes, and skilled laborers forced him to resort back to slave trading.⁴¹ The slave trade would persist for nearly two more decades in Little Popo before coming to an end, effectively spelling the port's doom.

In 1852, Little Popo, Grand Popo, and Aghwey all signed treaties with the British agreeing to end the slave trade in their ports. Much to Britain's dismay, resourceful local merchants like the Lawsons merely found different means to continue their trade. By 1856, a beach between Little Popo and Aghwey had become the most popular place for loading slaves. Unfortunately for the merchants of Little Popo, Ghezo's nephew Glele rose to power in Whydah in 1858, and reestablished the slave trade in that larger port city. Joao Pinheiro Taparica, de Souza's son-in-law, was listed as a slave trader in Whydah during this time according to renowned British explorer Richard Francis Burton.⁴² Whydah stopped its exports to Cuba, which would collapse and launch a war of independence in 1868, in 1866, after local merchants became resentful to "the military mobilization which disrupted oil production and of high and arbitrary levels of [local] taxation of their activities."⁴³

War and violence stemming from illegal slavery forced the people of places like Little Popo into a vicious circle. As slavery was still viable and profitable, the African merchants continued to use violence to gather slaves. However, this made investments in palm produce plantations very risky, as violence from wars sometimes spilled over onto the aggressors land and raids by rival kingdoms were always a possibility. Illegal slavery was an industry that benefited from this violence and destruction, and the traders had very mobile capital, unlike those invested in palm produce. Raids and wars led to merchants at Little Popo having high time preferences, meaning that they wanted to participate in industries that had quick and seemingly safer returns that required less initial investment than the alternatives; slavery was a better option than the available forms of “legitimate commerce.”

The correlation between war and slavery in the era of illegal slave trading is best shown by an article on the planned reestablishment of the slave trade in Whydah, published December 26, 1857. When it was announced that slavery would resume in Whydah, the Abbeokuta people had already raided their neighbors and taken captives to be sold at the reopened coastal market. The article discusses the events unfolding in Ibadan, where raiding parties were being amassed in preparation for an attack on Jaboo country. The writer reports that Ibadan raiders had already seized some Jaboos residing in Ibadan and sent them to Whydah to be sold as slaves. The British governor of Ibadan, Mr. Campbell, was quoted as saying, “Unless the intention of purchasing slaves at Whydah is abandoned, we shall have the whole of the Yoruba country plunged into warfare to supply the demand of the slave-market at Whydah.”⁴⁴ The British recognized that slavery thrived on conflict, and they also knew that conflict deterred businessmen from investing in stationary endeavors with high startup costs.

In the latter half of the 19th century, Britain's policy was to subdue warmongering and bring about a true end to the slave trade via peace. The extent of British operations underscores the amount of instability and fighting that occurred during this time. On April 13, 1864, the pacification process began in Little Popo. The Headmen of Little Popo and Aghwey agreed to let the Royal Navy arbitrate a peace between them. Pedro Cudjoe had led a band of Popo warriors in a war against the people of Aghwey, but because the people of Aghwey had made a promise with the Commander of the British man-of-war the *Spitfire* two years earlier to not fight with their neighbors, they did not begin to counter Cudjoe's attack until their town was already on fire.⁴⁵ The British repeated efforts like this one across West Africa. When the Ashanti invaded Togo in 1873, the British government began to patrol the coastlines with more frequency, ironically disrupting merchant traffic as it was attempting end the slave trade by bringing about peace.

The travails of British merchant Andrew Swanzy shed light on the harmful effects of British naval policies on Togo's trade. On February 28, 1873, Swanzy wrote to Cabo Corso and forbid the sale of his firm's guns or gunpowder to the Assinee. He then sent the *Alligator* to Grand Bassam, a lagoon port under British dominion at the time, to give to Colonel Harley's protected tribe 3,260 kegs of gunpowder. Because the Ashanti invaders were neighbors, rumors spread among military circles that he was also supplying the enemy for a profit. Swanzy in fact wanted to protect the palm oil manufactured in Grand Bassam, which the Ashanti threatened. Swanzy complained about the lack of infrastructure in Grand Bassam and protection by the British government:

The effects of British protection on the Gold Coast, and such the result of laws and regulations, are wholly unsuited to the social condition of the natives and obstructive and injurious to commerce. Regardless of the interests of British merchants, and anxious only to raise a large revenue, the colonial authorities neglected all precautions in handing us over to the Dutch; and when my property was destroyed by them, H.M. Government, anxious only to maintain friendly

relations with the Government of the Netherlands, eagerly accepted every excuse made by the other.⁴⁶

Britain's naval policies, although meant to pacify disruptive kingdoms, caused unintentional harm to the trade they were supposed to be protecting.

The threat of property destruction caused by war and raiding was the primary cause of the reluctance of merchants in places like Little Popo to transition to "legitimate commerce." Risk aversion comes into play when the victors of small wars are able to appropriate the plantations of merchants and businessmen. Africans in areas with high levels of illegal slave trading would not want to risk investing in palm oil plantations, because the mills and refineries needed to run one call for too large of an initial investment when the risks of losing both the crop yield and possibly the infrastructure are taken into account. Smallholdings were not an option, either, as high, predictable yields are linked to the size of the farm and the technology purchased, and larger farms and plantations are safer investments than smallholdings.⁴⁷ Entrance into the palm produce trade for merchants from Little Popo and Aghwey would not have been easy for another reason, though – British territories dominated the market. In 1827, 4,962 Cwt (hundred weight) of palm oil was exported from the Gold Coast. By 1833, 25,559 Cwt of palm oil was coming out of the territory.⁴⁸ The palm oil trade was lucrative in British territories where slavery had been banned, and though it may have been profitable in the long run in places like Little Popo where illegal slavery persisted, the risks associated with slave raids and market entry deterred many merchants from investing in it.

Throughout the 1800s, George Lawson Senior and Glele continued to promote a policy of violence and instability against their neighbors in pursuit of slaves, gathering their wealth from a trade that did not lead to the economic development of the towns exporting the goods. This made it difficult for George Lawson Junior and others to develop the palm oil trade as an economic

substitute in Little Popo. If British policies had not given men like Lawson Senior and dos Santos the hope that their families could maintain their status without switching markets, by forcing the slave trade away from larger ports, this may not have happened. If African merchants had possessed lower time preferences, then Little Popo may have been able to transition to a system of “legitimate commerce.”

Conclusion

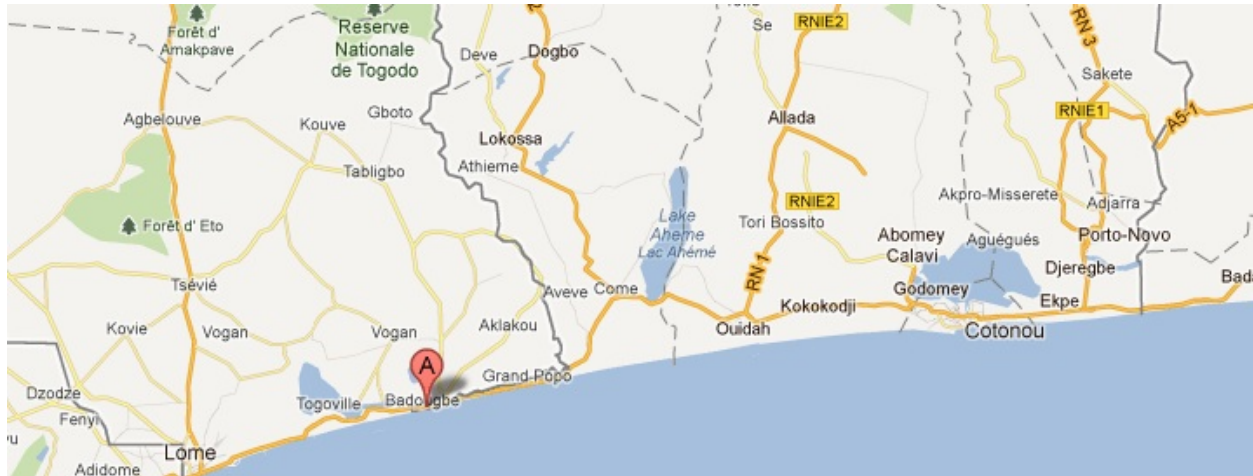
In 1843 British explorer John Duncan placed the population of Little Popo at 5,000 and 1,500 for Aghwey.⁴⁹ The Lacs prefecture in Togo, which comprises the towns that used to make up Little Popo, now has 172,148 residents. However, the significance of this town has decreased tremendously since the era of the slave trade. Once a favorite port of slave traders and European merchants, Little Popo failed to adapt to changing economic conditions and fell into obscurity. Lome is now the principal port in Togo, replacing Aneho in 1904 when the Germans built a pier there.⁵⁰

Little Popo’s decline can ultimately be traced back to the British abolition of the slave trade in West Africa, which had profound effects on smaller slave ports. Little Popo’s prominence as a slave port at the end of the 18th century continued well into the 19th century due to British policies on slavery and the business practices of local merchants. Royal Navy anti-slavery patrols forced merchants involved in the illegal slave trade to fill their cargos using slaves from small ports like Little Popo. Regions like these already routinely raided each other for slaves, making it more profitable to continue that trade than to switch to “legitimate commerce.” This is because the risks involved with long term investments in industries like palm produce were heightened due to the conflict and violence spurred on by the continuation of the slave trade. Local merchants thus developed a high time preference in their dealings, leading

them to choose the illegal slave trade over “legitimate commerce.” The British crackdown on large slave trading ports led to the continuation of the destructive slave trade in small ports like Little Popo, which dissuaded many merchants from investing in palm produce and similar industries. The town continued to survive during the era of “legitimate commerce” by supplementing its trade with illegal slaving, which caused it to fall behind larger ports in terms of growth and development, so when the slave trade finally ended, so did its prosperity.

Little Popo was not the only place to see an increase in economic activity after the slave trade was forced out of the larger slave ports, nor was it the only place to fail to capitalize on the palm oil trade; Little Popo’s history is the history of scores of towns on the West African coast, which became insignificant after the slave trade ended. This type of cisatlantic approach to the study of the Transatlantic Slave Trade can help shine light on dynamics and effects not often discussed, as they do not pertain to plantations in the New World or metropolitan African ports. The history of lagoon ports like Little Popo can provide insight into political and economic mechanisms of the slave trade that are often overlooked.

Figure 1: (A) is Little Popo, with Lome to the west and Grand Popo and Whydah (Ouidah) to the east



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