

Oruwari-Briggs house and the evolution of contemporary Kalabari society

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Abstract

The evolution of contemporary Kalabari society reflects the contour of a historical progression of a people who struggled to manage the competing forces of unity and disunity in their existence. As a polity, it evolved from a fishing village to a city-state, to an empire, and to a republic or confederacy. This work examines the role of Oruwari-Briggs House in this evolutionary trajectory from the pre-colonial through the colonial to the post-colonial period. Methodologically, the work adopts the political economy approach. From oral and archival sources, published and unpublished works, the study demonstrates that the Oruwari-Briggs House played a strategic role in the inter-house rivalry, the formation of groups, and political alliances that culminated in the disintegration of Elem Kalabari, movement of populations to new settlements, the transformation of traditional political institutions, and the emergence of multiple centers of power symbolized by the existence of *Amayanapu* in contemporary Kalabari as against an *Amayanabo* for the entire polity in the pre-colonial period.

Keywords:

Oruwari-Briggs house; Kalabari society; the evolution of contemporary.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Kalabari was among the first merchant groups in the Niger Delta that developed a high level of commercial civilization in the trade with the Europeans (Dike, 1956). The evolution of Kalabari shall be analyzed from the temporal and socio-political perspectives. Temporally, this evolution can be gleaned from the prehistoric through the proto-historic to the historical, the colonial and post-colonial era. The prehistoric period saw the migration from disparate origins and settlement of the Endeme, Korome, Amabiame, Akialame, Ituruame, Bukome, and Igodome groups in Elem Kalabari in the eastern Niger Delta. They established seven quasi-autonomous wards and collectively propelled its transition from a fishing village to a city-state (Horton, 1969: 41). While the Endeme or Kalabari-Polo established the monarchy, the Korome group came with the goddess, Owame Akaso, the tutelary deity of the people. Therefore, they "seem to have exercised most influence on the history of the city" (Alagoa, 1972: 135). The proto-historic period began with the reign of King Oweri Daba of the Korome ward in the sixteenth to 1770, and the historic period lasted between 1770 and 1884 when Elem Kalabari disintegrated leading to the dispersal and resettlement of its populations in Bakana, Abonnema and Buguma (Jones, 1963; Okorosaye-Orubite, 2016: 3-4).

The periods had concomitant social, economic, and political dynamics that influenced their progression and linkages in the huge interactions of internal and external forces (Okorosaye-Orubite, 2016: 4). The reference to Elem Kalabari as Kengema, Owame, Iwo Kalabari, and New Calabar at different times indicated the changes within its body politics (Alagoa, 1972: 137). Before the advent of the Amachree dynasty, the mode of economic production was fishing and the development of the local, long-distance trade between Kalabari and her hinterland neighbors. At the same time, Elem Kalabari was administered by an "assembly, Ama Kobiri, which had both policy-making and judicial functions, and dealt with all village affairs other than minor matters arising within particular descent groups or age-sets" (Horton, 1969: 41). Brown-West (cited in Alagoa, 1972: 135) sees Elem Kalabari as "apparently of the composite structure." As an empire, Kalabari comprised the "metropolitan city of Elem Kalabari; the outlying towns of Kalabari culture; and the communities, some of which had been alien culture" (Alagoa, 1972: 134). These communities were fully integrated from 1765 under King Amachree I, the founder of the Amachree dynasty and empire-builder, who extended his political jurisdiction to Ifoko and Ke through cultural and religious affiliations; Tombia, through the tact and statesmanship of offer of protection from enemies like Agbaniye Ejike of Bille; and, Elem Bakana, Bukuma, Obonoma and Udekema (Degema) through conquests (Alagoa, 1972: 139-40; Okorosaye-Orubite, 2016: 7).

At the sub-state level, the lineage system transited to the canoe-house system of a man and his household, extended family members, trading assistants, slaves, and servants. From the sixteenth century, the strength of a canoe-house became determined by the number of slaves the house head had acquired for the purposes of trade, war, and domestic service (Wariboko, 2007: 305-6; Keni-Briggs 03/03/2012). Every non-Kalabari was carefully assimilated, and all loyal and enterprising male adoptees could rise to the leadership of the house (Wariboko, 2007: 305-6). Elem Kalabari became a "slave-holding and slave using society" with a slave mode of production as slaves dominated all sectors of the society: as trading agents, collateral securities for investment loans, high and low state officials, concubines and wives for the state elite, personnel for manning of war-canoes, servants for doing domestic and national chores, and as the potential sacrificial items to the capricious divinities of the state. Consequently, achievement replaced ascription as the former became "the most important criterion for determining social status" (Wariboko 2014: 45). The transitions manifested radical changes and the roles of canoe-houses in the restructuring of Kalabari. Hence, the inter-lineage rivalry "between two maximally expanded power blocs- the Awo-Barboy versus the Amachree groups of houses" and concomitant alliances led to the disintegration of Elem Kalabari and the founding of Bakana in 1879-1882, Abonnema in 1881-1882, Buguma in 1884 (Wariboko, 2014: 7). The transitions were complemented by changes and the collapse of the indigenous socio-cultural institutions of the people. The analysis of the role of Oruwari-Briggs House in this trajectory is the object of this work.

2 HOUSE, KINSHIP, INHERITANCE, AND SUCCESSION IN KALABARI SOCIETY

The nuclear family was always the product of either the *iya*, *igwa* or *waribobesime* forms of traditional marriage, with implications for inheritance, succession and kinship. *Iya* is the most lawful and highest form. *Iya* forbids divorce and the offspring belong to the man's family. *Igwa*, lesser than *iya*, permits divorce and the children belong to the woman's family. While an *igwa* marriage can be converted into *iya*, the reverse is not permissible. *Waribobesime* is the marriage between non-blood related members of the same house (Wariboko, 2007: 307-8). The war-canoe house was more than a mere descent group. It is "a compact and well-organized trading and fighting corporation, capable of manning and maintaining a war-canoe"(Jones 1963: 55). It comprises "a number of persons grouped together for the purposes of trade and subject by native law and custom to the control, authority, and rule of a chief known as the head of the house"(Alagoa, 1964: 15). The house expanded by birth and recruitment of new members through marriages, adhesion, purchase of slaves, and adoption (Wariboko, 2007: 28).

On the arrival of a new adoptee, "the breaking-off of all previous kinship ties and the assumption of the whole series of new ties were brought home to him by means of a dramatic rite de passage in which his new 'mother' shaved his head clean and then gave him a ritual meal" (Horton, 1969: 48). Accordingly, the "new member was given a Kalabari name. A ritual bath is taken to cleanse the person and signify absorption into the new family. From this moment, the new member had all the rights and privileges as all other naturally-born members of the house" (Wariboko, 2007: 305). Adopted members of the canoe-house were given fictive kinship ties (Wariboko, 1997: 58-9). Kinship confers social recognition and expression of genealogical relationships, be they consanguineal (blood), affinal (marriage), or fictive (adoption). Descent among the Kalabari is traced through the males, patrilineal or agnatic, as against the matrilineal or uterine descent system. However, where descent and inheritance are traced through both father and mother (double-unilineal) generating lasting groups beginning with lineages and progressing, in size and complexity, from clans through phratries to moieties. The bi-lateral descent system involves tracing through both mother and father, but inheriting only through one generates a non-permanent group, the kindred.

Descent confers on the individual the right to inheritance of property and succession to a chieftaincy stool (Snither-Briggs 18/03/2012; Nimifaa-Briggs 03/03/2012). In Kalabari, the ancestral and personal chieftaincy stools are dominant, but a prospective occupant must demonstrate wealth and capacity of equipping a war-canoe (*omuaru*) and the gig (*alali-aru*). In Kalabari, no matter how wealthy a woman might be, she cannot occupy a chieftaincy stool but could have one named after her in recognition of a gallant role such as the Orupumbu stool in the Tariah House of Buguma (John-Briggs 18/02/2012). The customs and traditions of Kalabari are embedded in the culture and enriched by the belief system that characterized their religious life symbolized by the worship of ancestors (*duein*), deified community heroes (*oru*), and water-spirits (*owu*) (Wariboko, 2007: 307; Horton, 1993: 21).

3 ORUWARI-BRIGGS HOUSE IN ELEM KALABARI

By the nineteenth century, the wards had transited to groups of houses, with most of the headships succeeded by adopted slaves, and their demographic expansion encouraged to grow the workforce to achieve comparative competitive advantage (Jones, 1963: 172; Wariboko, 2014: 35-6). Under Amachree III, houses which had suffered decline previously re-established themselves (Jones, 1963: 140). The process of accretion and fission enhanced the exponential expansion and dominance of the city-state by the Endeme ward, while the other six wards diminished in population and gradually receded into political irrelevance by the turn of the nineteenth century (Wariboko, 2014: 35). Subsequently, segmentation increasingly occurred with wealthy house members budding off to head their own houses within the parent houses, while the *amayanabo* competed in trade with his subjects from his or other houses (Dike, 1956: 164; Anene, 1966: 32). But, inter-marriage, as a fundamental cultural process, played a vital role in the integration process. For instance, the Owukori-Manuel (Endeme) and Oruwari-Briggs (Akialame) Houses were linked by the marriage of Boni, Akiala's daughter, to Robert Kalagbea, which produced Awo, founder of the Awo-Barboy group, who begat Odum, Owukori, and Otaji. Young-Briggs of Oruwari married Ekenta, King Karibo Amachree's IV daughter, while Awoye Briggs' mother was the daughter of Bob-Manuel (John-Briggs 18/02/2012).

Oruwari House originated from the Dueinala ancestry in the Akialame ward (Keni-Briggs 03/03/2012). Dueinala, whose trade name was "Black Jimmy" and manilla his trademark, had by 1782 accumulated enormous wealth to the chagrin of King Amachree I, who decided to put him under check (Ibim-Briggs 29/05/2012). Consequently, Dueinala and many of his house members fled Elem Kalabari and took refuge in other settlements. After Dueinala, Asukein, the new leader of Akialame lacked the economic resources to rebuild the house and was succeeded by Ikata, a renowned merchant, who tried unsuccessfully to bring the remnants of the lineage together (John-Briggs 18/02/2012). It was Oruwari Biriki, corrupted to Oruwari-Briggs, Ikata's successor, who rebuilt the Dueinala's house in his name. Akiala was a contemporary of Kalagbea, while Dueinala, was a contemporary of Amachree I. Akialame's Biegbolo daughter, Ojie Biriki, married Beye Amakiri of Ifoko and had Inoma, Oruwari's father (Lulu-Briggs 29/05/2012).

Oruwari was the son of Iniibatangamuari (mother) and Inoma (father) both of Dueinala house. Pregnant Iniibatangamuari had sought refuge at Minama's community shrine, where she gave birth to Oruwariyibo (child born in a shrine). Young Oruwari grew up in Minama, became aware of his Dueinala's ancestry in Elem Kalabari, came to Elem Kalabari, adopted the grandfather's trademark of Black Jimmy, became very prosperous, and established the Oruwari chieftaincy stool in 1836 (John-Briggs 12/02/2012). By this time, members of Oruwari-Briggs canoe-house of Elem Kalabari dominated the exploitation of the Obaku port in the producing center of Ibaa (Wariboko 2014: 69). Oruwari who accumulated great wealth but without a biological child, adopted forty-three children after an oracular confirmation that he would never have biological children. His first adopted son or Isiowu (first slave) Opuda Iniikeiroari Young-Briggs hailed from Obowu in present-day Imo State (John-Briggs 12/02/12). By 1863, the human and merchant capital

accumulation of Iniikeiroari Young-Briggs had qualified him for a chieftaincy stool. Still, Oruwari disagreed since the former, and his descendants would inherit the possessions of the latter. On his ascension to the Oruwari stool as Oruwari II in 1867, Young-Briggs created the Bestman Ajumogobia and Member chieftaincy stools.

Meanwhile, by 1863, the lineage rivalry in Elem Kalabari between Awo-Barboy House led by Igbaniibo Will Braid and Amachree House in the politics of monarchical succession at the death of King Karibo Amachree III and attendant alliances had degenerated. The unacceptability of Princewill as Amayanabo even after formal enthronement in 1863 influenced the relocation of Will Braid and Young-Briggs from Elem Kalabari to new settlements (Keni-Briggs 03/03/2012). "The socio-political instability is resulting from the activities of these oppositional alliances (Amachree and Bob-Manuel versus Awo-Barboy and Oruwari-Briggs) ... eventually emasculated the state and also pushed Princewill Amachree to seek the support and protection of the British Consul in 1883 before formal colonialism" (Wariboko 2014: 104-6). By 1884, "nineteen satellite and affiliated villages of the state also moved out of the estuary," marking the collapse of the Kalabari empire (Wariboko, 2014: 153). The impact of opposition, civil war (1879-1882), and separatism led to the irreparable undermining of the internal cohesion and stability of Elem Kalabari, the state's deformation, and transfer of sovereignty through the Treaty of Protection between Britain and Kalabari represented by its leaders, King Princewill Amachree IV, Chiefs Young-Briggs, George Amachree, Bob Manuel, John Bull, and Omekwe Horsefall Manuel (Wariboko, 2014: 161; Okorosaye-Orubite, 2016: 2).

Implicitly, "the principal organ of government, the assembly of house heads and *amayanabo*, was not particularly successful in maintaining order and regulating conflict" (Horton, 1969: 52). More so, the satellite communities of the empire were not "governed centrally" by the state as there were no traditional "consular officials" appointed to superintend over them. The civil war provided the communities conquered by Amachree I the long-awaited opportunity to regain freedom. In fact, "so loose was the political administration of the Empire that it would be more appropriate to refer to it as a 'Union' in which the provinces practiced 'self-rule.' Consequently, when the crisis split the canoe-houses in 'the capital of Elem Kalabari, Ifoko supported the Barboy, Abalama supported the Amakiri, while Tombia (New Town) was split between them" (Jones, 1963: 151; Okorosaye-Orubite, 2016: 14).

The relocation of Igbaniibo Will Braid, to escape an alleged assassination plot, from Elem Kalabari to the strategic "Twofe entrance to the New Calabar River markets on 10 July 1879", and blockade of the "markets that were recently secured from Bonny and Okrika" was a revolt that announced the Kalabari civil war (Wariboko, 2014: 144-5; Okorosaye-Orubite 2016: 10). This war defied internal and external mediations, even the British admiralty and consular intervention that produced the "perpetual treaty of peace between Will Braid and the King and Chiefs of New Calabar, November 19, 1879", but ended in 1882 after series of consular reprisals (Jones, 1963: 239-41; Okorosaye-Orubite, 2016: 10). The relocation of populations from Elem Kalabari and the founding of Bakana and Abonnema began the fall of the empire and its transition to a republic or confederacy. The mode of grouping and settlements following the dispersion from Elem Kalabari ignored any biological and filial relationships. Hence "Bob-Manuel, who has little, if any blood relationship with Briggs and Jack, settled with the latter in preference to settling with Abbi (his father's first cousin) and Wokoma (his sister's son) in Buguma" (Martyns-Yellowe, 1991: 141).

4 ORUWARI-BRIGGS HOUSE IN ABONNEMA (NYEMONI)

Geographically, Abonnema, traditionally known as Nyemoni, is bounded on the East by Krakrama, on the North by Degema, on the South by Oboṅoma, and on the West by the Sombrero River. In Abonnema, there are four major houses: Owukori-Bob-Manuel, Oruwari-Briggs, Otaji-Georgewill, and Iju-Jack. Historically, the founding of Abonnema has been a subject of disagreement and litigations between the Owukori-Bob-Manuel and Oruwari-Briggs Houses. The Owukori-Bob-Manuel tradition holds that the settlement was jointly founded by a group of canoe-house chiefs: Bob-Manuel (leader), Young-Briggs, Georgewill, Standfast Jack, Granville Don Pedro, Douglas Manuel, Black Duke, Bestman-Briggs, Young-Jack, Young-Don Pedro, and Memberr-Briggs, who went out together in search of a suitable location and got to the present site in November 1882. This is "the group" tradition documented in the Abonnema Centenary celebration booklet entitled "A Short History of Abonnema," published in 1982 (Wariboko, 2014: 152).

In contrast, the Oruwari-Briggs House tradition holds that Young-Briggs founded Abonnema in response to security and strategic considerations associated with the Amachree-Awo-Barboy rivalry and the Elem Kalabari inferno of 1878. It holds that Young-Briggs informed the Amayanabo of Kalabari, King Princewill Amachree IV, his in-law, of his decision to relocate the Oruwari-Briggs House due to demographic congestion (Taska-Briggs, 17/03/2012). Following the King's approval, Young-Briggs and his men identified a suitable settlement site on the Sombrero River, the route to the important Ikwerre hinterland market of Ndelle, in June 1881 when he negotiated with the Oboṅoma people, the original owners of the land (Keni-Briggs 03/03/2012; Memberr-Briggs 09/05/2012; Wokoma 26/06/2012). According to the Abonnema Diamond Jubilee Committee, Abonnema was founded on the 16th of June 1881, while the Abonnema-Bonny war was fought on the 7th of March, 1882 (ADJC/56/1, 18/02/1956).

The 1880s was the height of Niger Delta inter-city-states' competition for hinterland markets with Elem Kalabari and Bonny as arch-rivals fighting over the Ndelle market in the Ikwerre hinterland. However, the marriage of King Pepple to the daughter of Bille's King Agbaniye Ejika gave Bonny the preponderant influence over Ndelle since Ejika gave it to Pepple as a traditional gift (Cookey, 1974:59). Therefore, the location of Abonnema on its route threatened Bonny, which was already in decline following Jaja's relocation to Opobo and take-over of all former markets. In the Abonnema-Bonny war of 1882, Young-Briggs, with an enviable armory at Alagbapiri, and his three war commanders (Ajuka, Alise, and Ichi) defeated the antagonists led by Oko Jumbo and the Dublin-Green House. Young-Briggs captured the Bonny warship, Sipiri, and seized their weapons produced with specifications from Glasgow containing Dublin-Green's name, the seal, and signature of Her Royal Majesty, Queen Victoria (John-Briggs 18/02/2012; Taska-Briggs, 17/03/2012). While the

captured Bonny men were integrated into the Oruwari-Briggs House, Young-Briggs gave a machine gun to King Amachree IV in demonstration of his loyalty. A sword and a giant paddle captured from Bonny were given to Obonoma in recognition of her support (John-Briggs, 18/02/2012).

The Oruwari-Briggs tradition also notes that a Liverpool merchant, Mr. Lloyd Anderson, visited Elem Kalabari in October 1881 to see Young Briggs, who had relocated to Abonnema, sent a congratulatory note with cartons of 12-in-one Hornet Gin through Chief Omekwe Horsfall to Young-Briggs (Snither-Briggs 18/03/2012). A few years later, Mr. Hooper, the Agent-General of Alexander Miller Brothers, visited Young-Briggs and established his trading company at Abonnema. He was followed by such trading companies as Thomas and Harrison and E. G. Williams, which were established at Degema. At the same time, Mr. Charles Degard of the Nut Cracking Company was provided space by Chief Bob-Manuel in his quarter (Obu-Young-Briggs 30/08/1956). By 1910, Abonnema had become a seaport and a strategic community in the political economy of the Nigerian colonial state.

Young-Briggs brought the chieftaincy stools and ancestral screens, duein fubara of Akiala, Dueinala, Luku, Ikata, Ojuye-Briki, Beye-Amakiri, Beye-Gbolo, Oruwari from Elem Kalabari, and created the Alabraba, Dueinala and Cyclops-Ideria chieftaincy stools in Abonnema (Nimifaa-Briggs 03/03/2012; Wenike-Briggs 26/05/2012; Memberr-Briggs 09/05/2012). Upon his death in 1905, Chief Ada Frank Briggs (Oruwari III) created the Young-Briggs stool in recognition of his accomplishments (Ibim-Briggs and Ngo-Briggs 29/05/2012). Since 1882, the four house-heads operated as equals with the incumbent on the oldest stool, Owukori-Bob-Manuel, as Chairman of Ama Kobiri (Abonnema Council of Chiefs). This changed from 1886 due to contestations over the Amayanabo of Abonnema stool between Owukori-Bob-Manuel and Oruwari-Briggs Houses (Memberr-Briggs 09/05/2012). According to Okorosaye-Orubite (2016: 11), "in 1886, the dispute between Chiefs Bob Manuel and Young-Briggs over the ... ownership of Abonnema had raged on to fever pitch and King Abbi had to intervene and settle the dispute". King Abbi awarded the ownership of Abonnema to Owukori-Bob-Manuel on two considerations: firstly, that Bob-Manuel was his nephew; and, secondly, that Young-Briggs was the greatest supporter of Will Braid against the Amachree during the Kalabari civil war (Wokoma 26/06/2012). The inter-House rivalry and alliances between Oruwari-Briggs and Iju-Jack Houses versus Owukori-Bob-Manuel and Otaji-Georgewill Houses in Abonnema almost exploded in 1929, 1936 and 1946, but for the intervention of the British District Officers (Nigerian Tide, Monday, May 1, 1978). In 1996, King Obaye Abiye Suku, Amachree X, and Kalabari Se Kobiri gave the verdict that if there was a stool as the Amayanabo of Abonnema, it should rotate between the Owukori-Bob-Manuel and Oruwari-Briggs Houses (Memberr-Briggs 09/05/2012).

Among Abonnema neighbors, the Oruwari-Briggs House radiated its influence. Few years after his settlement in Abonnema, Young-Briggs mediated between Degema (Opu Dekema) and Isokun (Kala Dekema) persuaded Isokun to move further inland towards Harry's Town (Obuama), while Degema settled at its present site. Afterward, Young Briggs established a plantation in the buffer area between them to prevent further skirmishes (Wokoma, 26/06/2012) and acquired Owusara from Udekema (Ikiriko, George, and Brown 15/06/2012). The Oruwari-Briggs House has a cordial relationship with Minama, the birthplace of Oruwari (Briggs II); Ifoko, the birthplace of Beye-Amakiri; and Krakrama, Young-Briggs' plantation and production center with Inuoakpana as an agent. The Oruwari-Briggs House is also connected with Tema through Memberr and Cyclops Ideriah units (Ibim-Briggs and Ngo-Briggs, 29/05/2012).

5 COLONIALISM, ORUWARI-BRIGGS HOUSE AND THE KALABARI SOCIETY

The waning of Kalabari's traditional power structures and the authority of the king and Ama Se Kobiri, which began with the relocation of the Awo-Barboy group from Elem Kalabari, came to a head with the ratification of "the Treaty between Great Britain and New Calabar," " from the date of its signature (the) the fourth day of July 1884" (Jones, 1963: 243-5; Okorosaye-Orubite, 2016: 15). According to Okorosaye-Orubite (2016: 15-16), by this Treaty, the traditional political independence of New Calabar and powers of the king and house-heads were instantly ceded to Her Majesty, the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, who offered to protect and administer it under her jurisdiction. The treaty began the intrusion of alien factors into Kalabari traditional institutions of governance, and their transformation or annihilation by the agents of the British monarch, especially the Consular officials, like Vice-Consul Harry Johnston, in line with the concepts of civilization, commerce, and Christianity approved by Joseph Chamberlain of the Colonial Office, London, in his "Omelet Speech of 1891" (Wariboko, 2007: 97-8).

British colonialism facilitated the evolution of Kalabari through its damaging impact on the authority of the King of Kalabari to exercise full suzerainty over the entire kingdom. Afigbo (1972) notes that under the indirect rule, the British colonial government adopted the warrant system whereby selected house heads were appointed to sit in the Native Courts and Councils following the Native Court Proclamation of 1901. At its inauguration, British colonialism transferred the powers and functions of the King to the colonial local officers, and abolished comey, the economic means by which the King "could build up his power" and instrument of trade monopoly (Jones 1963: 187; Okorosaye-Orubite, 2016: 14). According to Jones (1970: 317),

(The colonial state) recognized heads of houses but not kings ... as instruments of local government. The members of its local government councils were the heads of houses. The king, if he was the head of a house, was a member of the council but not its president and the subsidies paid in lieu of the former comey duties were not paid to the king but to the more powerful of these house heads. The office of king had lost any political value to both the government and the local people.

When Ralph Moor introduced the payment of subsidy in lieu of comey to Kalabari chiefs, King Princewill Amachree IV earned £60, Chiefs Young-Briggs and Bob-Manuel earned £40 each, while others earned £20 (Wariboko, 2014: 242).

Young-Briggs became a very influential pioneer member of the Kalabari Native Court and Council inaugurated by the vice-consul on 13 May 1893, at Degema. During the negotiation for the resolution of the Kalabari-Oguta crisis associated with commercial competition for favorable market prices and search for advantageous profit maximization, which led to the operation of night markets by Oguta and attendant notoriety and harassment of Kalabari merchants, Chiefs Frank Bestman of the Oruwari-Briggs House, Charlie Douglas and Harrison Lawson petitioned the Government of Southern Nigeria. Consequently, after the abolition of Oguta midnight market, Frank Bestman and other Kalabari chiefs recommended the granting of a judicial warrant to Osima George Amachree to sit on the Oguta native court from 1915 to represent their interests until 1934 when it was passed on to Chief Hutton Tom George (Wariboko, 2014: 236).

Obviously, Kalabari rulers were neither perceived nor treated by the subjects as gods incarnate like the Aku of Jukun (Meek, 1969: 120-77) or the Alafin of Oyo (Lloyd, 1960: 221-37), but indigenous values and beliefs had hedged them with an aura of supernatural awe and controlling fear (Wariboko, 2007: 103). However, the colonial introduction of subsidy and elevation of house heads over the king was the hallmark of the de-legitimization of the king, once a unifying factor of Kalabari, and the transfer of his cultural value and political role to the president of the Native Court and Council. Therefore, the colonial authority withheld the recognition of King Princewill Amachree's successors between 1901 and 1957 (Wariboko, 2007: 117), which was attributed to "the succession disputes between the Amachree and Awo-Barboy Houses after 1900" when King Princewill Amachree died (Wariboko, 1991: 380-3). Implicitly, this contestation commenced the emasculation of those values and beliefs that previously hedged the *amayanabo* and house heads "with an aura of supernatural awe and controlling fear" in the people. The gradual desertion of *amadabo* and arrogation of *amayanabo* title, previously meant for the natural ruler of the entire kingdom, by heads of individual Kalabari communities, which began with the founding of Bakana and Abonnema, also generated the dynamics that weakened traditional authority.

Meanwhile, the repeal of the House Rule Ordinance and the abolition of domestic slavery in 1915 had significantly ebbed the powers of the house heads (Tamuno, 1967: 154-68). Attributed "to the sustained criticism of the missionaries against the house system," the repeal occasioned the inability of Kalabari house heads, by 1935, to exercise "any legal access to the unpaid labor" of house members thereby resulting to the deficiency of human and economic resources of the nineteenth century (Wariboko, 2007: 117). Consequently, the old mandatory requirement of fitting out a war-canoe of fifty-two men was replaced with a mere payment of an installation fee of £25 and lavish feasting of supporters by the 1930s (Marshall, 1943; Wariboko, 2007: 118). After 1945, "membership of the native councils was thrown open to popular vote ... without regard to circumstances of birth or social status", a situation that hastens the collapse of the indigenous system and the evolution of contemporary Kalabari society (Wariboko, 2007: 118). Thus, "... today whether a man is a product of *iya* marriage or not does not affect his status in his father's family provided members of the family or House accept him. Today in Kalabari, that one's mother is not married under the *iya* system of marriage is no longer a bar to succession to chieftaincy stool in the father's house" (Thompson-Briggs DHC/16/98: 6).

In fact, "the introduction of Christianity subtly assisted the already potential political instability to the point of disruption" (Okorosaye-Orubite, 2016: 13). Complementing this position, Wariboko (2014: 139) notes that "the attacks against ancestor worship, threatened the very basis of chieftaincy and the entire social formation" of Kalabari society. Chamberlain's Omelet Speech (cited in Wariboko, 2007: 97) partly reads "you cannot have an omelet without breaking eggs; you cannot destroy the practices of barbarism, of slavery, or superstition, ... without the use of force." Therefore, the stout opposition of King Abbi Amachree IV, and the majority of the chiefs, prominent among whom was Young-Briggs, the priests and priestesses, to the establishment of Christianity in Elem Kalabari in the 1870s and the ideological confrontation it attracted divided the Ama Se Kobiri between the anti- and pro-Christianity groups. According to Okorosaye-Orubite (1990: 86), "even after its introduction, Christianity still faced opposition ... leading to political and social upheavals". The ideological revolution against traditionalism successfully dismantled the governance structures of the social formation before Nigeria's political independence but became consolidated in the post-colonial era. The post-colonial state led by educated Nigerians, imbued with notions of westernization and modernization, could not do anything to reverse the dangerous tide.

The post-colonial manifestation of competitive quest for government recognition as a First, Second- or Third-class chief, a transition from colonial warrant system, to guarantee unhindered access to petro-wealth overtly complicated social conflicts in contemporary Kalabari. Currently, the Oruwari-Briggs House is internally polarized into the R. R. Briggs, G. N. Alabraba, and O. B. Lulu-Briggs blocs by the politics of succession to the paramount stool of Oruwari, while Abonnema is divided between the Owukori-Bob-Manuel and Oruwari-Briggs over the ownership and/or headship of Abonnema, and Kalabari polarized over the jurisdiction of Amayanabo of Kalabari, if it still exists. Among these power blocs in Oruwari-Briggs House, only G. N. Alabraba and his group of chiefs were attending both the Abonnema Ama Kobiri and Kalabari Se Kobiri, while members of the R. R. Briggs and O. B. Lulu-Briggs were only committed to the Kalabari Se Kobiri at Buguma until 2006 when O. B. Lulu-Briggs bloc accepted the advice of King T. J. T. Princewill, Amachree XI, Amayanabo of Kalabari/Buguma, to reconcile with the Abonnema Ama Kobiri. However, R. R. Briggs-led faction rejected the advice as tantamount to the recognition and acceptance of the Owukori-Bob-Manuel House as the paramount House of Abonnema by the Amayanabo of Kalabari. These divisions have attracted diverse modern practices perceived as innovations, but incongruous with Kalabari established traditions and affected the overall traditional organization of Kalabari. The recognition of His Royal Majesty, King Disraeli Bob-Manuel, Owukori X, as Amayanabo of Abonnema by the Rivers State Government tends to limit the jurisdiction of "Amayanabo of Kalabari" to Buguma.

6 CONCLUSION

This is an exposition of the critical role and influence of the Oruwari-Briggs House in the evolution of contemporary Kalabari society, which is being confronted by the crisis of modernity. The accumulation of merchant capital facilitated its rise to prominence during the Atlantic world economy, its integration consolidated by the development of the Amachree dynasty, while its disintegration was the result of inter-house rivalry for political control and challenge to the monarchy of Amachree. It evolved from a simple fishing village to a city-state, to an empire, and now to a republic or confederacy with concomitant fall of the Amachree dynasty and decentralization of political authority. The rise of multiple power bases led to the collapse of traditional governance structures and the gradual extinction of the designation of Amayanabo of Kalabari. Following the fall of the Kalabari empire and the rise of republicanism or confederacy, a single Amayanabo of Kalabari is now being replaced with Amayanabos (*amayanapu*) for several Kalabari communities that were previously under a traditional ruler.

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